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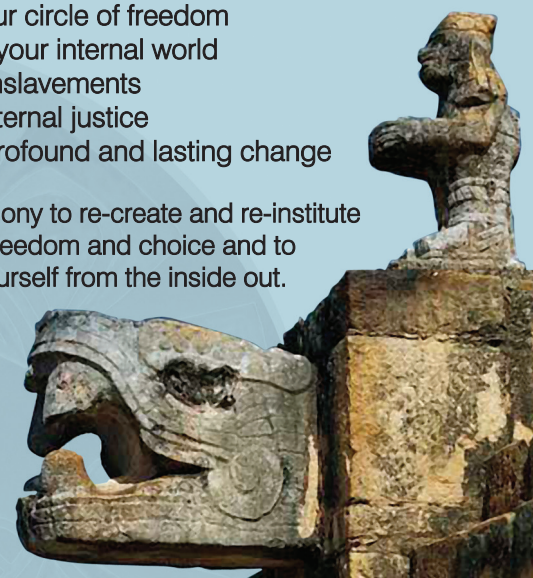
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25 APRILS

Common Ground from 1983 to 2007 22
 Joseph Roberts

HEALTHY CULTURE

Havidol – when more is not enough 11

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Bear necessities 14
 Barbara Murray

Eagleridge fallout 15
 Ned Jacobs

HEALTHY PEOPLE

Laughter rules! 6
 Geoff Olson

Defying your drug regimen 9
 Alan Cassels

Nature as therapy 12
 Toni Pieroni

It's a wonder full world 13
 Bruce Sanguin

Forgiveness and freedom 21
 Calvin Sandborn

HEALTHY SPIRITUALITY

Conversations with Neale Donald Walsch 14

Dan Millman on personal leadership 15

IN EVERY ISSUE:

CULTURE

Amazing Grace vs. The Host 20

FILMS WORTH WATCHING Robert Alstead

ENVIRONMENT

BC sets hot air standards 16

EARTHFUTURE Guy Dauncey

If you were prime minister 17

SCIENCE MATTERS David Suzuki

HEALTH

Vegetarian dinners made easy 10

NUTRISPEAK Vesanto Melina

ORGANICS

Spring's busy little bees 20

ON THE GARDEN PATH Carolyn Herriot

SPIRITUALITY

Everything is alive 18

POWER OF NOW Eckhart Tolle

Respect your neighbour 19

UNIVERSE WITHIN Gwen Randall-Young

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR 24

RESOURCE DIRECTORY 25

DATEBOOK 32

CLASSIFIED 33

ON TRACK ZODIAC 34



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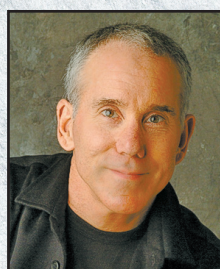
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Laughter rules!

In praise of nonsense

by Geoff Olson

These are serious times. In a world of worry and woe, it takes some creativity to find ways to forget ourselves. Across the world, people are finding new means to “lose it.” From India to China to East Vancouver, participants gather at “laughter clubs,” with the sole purpose of laughing at nothing for extended periods of time.



I tried a variation of this myself. Last summer, I lay in a group of a dozen people in a field on Salt Spring Island, with the back of my head resting against the stomach of a stranger, who leaned her head against someone else's stomach, and so on, in a herringbone line-up of participants. The instructor stood and instructed the first person in the line-up to not laugh – not an easy thing to do given the absurdity of the situation. As his belly jiggled, the head of the next person bobbed up and down and she began to laugh in response. Laughter exploded along the reclining participants like a line of firecrackers. How could you not crack up when your head is leaning against someone who was convulsing with laughter?

The purpose of this seriously-silly exercise, during a seminar on humour, was to get the participants to experience the force of unrestrained laughter. Health experts know plenty about how laughter benefits the immune system. Yet laughter clubs and other organized efforts at spontaneous fun may seem a bit strange to westerners. They run counter to the persistent notion among WASPS that self-improvement shouldn't be all that easy or even enjoyable. They could also be seen to mock our more serious efforts in this department, whether through yoga, meditation, exercise, education, work or religious instruction.

Perhaps our ideas of happiness-as-birthright and our sombre efforts to get there are part of the problem. There's no

shortage of advice from the media about what we need to be happy and how to get it, yet this always seems to involve a heap of credit. Lifestyle advertisers tempt us with amazing possibilities, but few of us will become bodhisattvas with washboard stomachs and water views.

The end result is that a satisfying and complete life is always receding into some imagined future. It sometimes feels like a rigged game, with the pot of gold as vaporous as the registered retirement rainbow leading to it. As Tom Robbins wrote in an essay in 2003, it may seem a tall order cultivating a rich inner life in a culture “... whose institutions – academic, governmental, religious and otherwise – seem determined to suffocate it with a polyester pillow from Wal-Mart.”

Robbins, however, had a way out in mind: “Unbeknownst to most western intellectuals, there happens to be a fairly thin line between the silly and the profound, between the clear light and the joke, and it seems to me that on that frontier is the single most risky and significant place artists or philosophers can station themselves.”

And not just artists or philosophers; it's a risky business for anyone to wear the fool's coxcomb into a respectable setting. But membership has its rewards, starting with the fact that there are no monthly dues in the fools' borderless club.

Robbins himself is a practitioner of a kind of foolish literature that never fit well in the literary canon. The Toronto-New York lit-crit establishment favours writers who traffic in tragedy, through either fiction or memoir. Serious books endorsing the idea of an unfriendly, random universe are usually the ones deemed timeless. Describing a book as “difficult” is considered a recommendation rather than a red flag. This holds true for the rest of the “serious” arts as well. If you are an artist in search of an arts grant, obscurity helps. If you must have humour, it better be of the gallows variety. If you go for absurdity, make it in the spirit of Kafka rather than Cleese.

Back in 1909, UK writer G.K. Chesterton praised a different sort of foolishness in the writings of Lewis Carroll in his essay *A Defence of Nonsense*:

“We know what Lewis Carroll was in daily life: he was a singularly serious and conventional don, universally respected, but very much of a pedant and something of a Philistine. Thus his strange double life on earth and in dreamland emphasizes the idea that lies at the back

of nonsense – the idea of ‘escape’... into a world where things are not fixed horribly in an eternal appropriateness, where apples grow on pear trees and any odd man you meet may have three legs.

“Lewis Carroll, living one life in which he would have thundered morally against anyone who walked on the wrong plot of grass, and another life in which he would cheerfully call the sun green and the moon blue, was, by his very divided nature – his one foot on both worlds – a perfect type of the position of modern nonsense. His *Wonderland* is a country populated by insane mathematicians. We feel the whole is an escape into a world of masquerade; we feel that if we could pierce their disguises, we might discover that Humpty Dumpty and the March Hare were professors and Doctors of Divinity enjoying a mental holiday.”

Of course, ever since Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, we get the idea of an absurd world all too well. Outside the arts, we now have two extremes of officially-endorsed meaninglessness. The first is the “scientific” idea of a random universe ruled by inhuman forces to no particular purpose. The second is the religious fundamentalists' take on ancient myths. In the latter world view, metaphors are misread as literal truths, leaving a temperamental God (or Gods) as the only option, as unpredictable as electrons and as arbitrary as Alice's Red Queen.



It would seem there are few options between the two extremes of faith and faithlessness. One recent offering promotes a popular misinterpretation of quantum theory, in which the observer “creates” his or her reality, a half-truth that can only inflate the ego. It isn't that the solipsistic vision of pop science entertainment like *What the Bleep Do We Know?* is crazy, it's that it's not quite crazy enough. As Sir James Jeans

wrote prophetically in 1933, “The universe may not only turn out to be queerer than we imagine, but queerer than we *can* imagine.” So where does that leave us? In 1960, Zen philosopher and writer Alan Watts offered a unique perspective on meaning and meaninglessness. In his lecture *The Sense of Non-Sense*, he addressed the persistent human search for meaning, which has driven not only some of the highest productions of the arts and sciences, but some of the worst excesses of religion and politics as well.

Watts reasonably argued that the universe has no meaning, at least not in the semantic sense, because only words have meaning, signifying things beyond themselves. The set of letters that spells “fork” is not, itself, a fork. How could the universe – all that there is and ever will be – signify anything beyond itself? The cosmos, Watts insisted, is a system of patterns at play, a loom of electromagnetic waves weaving a tapestry of ever-changing themes. The whole shebang has a great resemblance to music and dancing, which, in themselves, make no sense because they're not intended to mean anything other than what they are. The meaning and the activity are one and the same.

Watts asked us to consider baroque music, which obviously doesn't signify any abstract idea, but neither does it express some concretely expressible emotion. “It is felt to be significant not because it means something other than itself, but because it is so satisfying as it is.” Watts pointed out that the feeling of meaninglessness is often equated with the existence of neurosis. “So many activities into which one is encouraged to enter, philosophies one is encouraged to believe in, religions one is encouraged to join, are commended on the basis of the fact they give life a meaning.”

They offer an escape hatch from the sinking ship of nihilism, the dead end that often results from believing in a purposeless universe. But what, Watts asked, does it mean that life has to have a purpose? “We feel life ought to have significance and be a symbol in at least that sense or at least not as arid a symbol as a mere sign.”

Fair enough. A person feels he or she should have some plan behind their life and that they should fit into some group enterprise that offers fellowship. Beyond this, there is the more immediate sense of meaning when you can satisfy all your biological urges. But given the uncer-

The fool of tradition is connected

Watts, who was never afraid of sounding foolish himself by talking a topic to death, believed that the universe exists "... because the flame is worth the candle." The manifest realm of all beings, subject to every conceivable experience, from heavenly to hellish, is an adventure that must somehow be worth having for it to have come about at all. Of course, the author had no proof for this metaphysical claim. It's his own unsatisfactory response to that unanswerable question: "Why is there something instead of nothing?" It's an unsolvable riddle we can better approach through myth rather than science. In interpreting eastern philosophy, westerners tend to focus

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Defying your drug regimen the do's and don'ts

HEALTH

DRUG BUST Alan Cassels

People often tell me the more they learn about prescription drugs, the more their instincts tell them they should disobey their doctors' orders. But they also wonder how they can possibly do that.

It's a tough question, but my answer, in a nutshell, is "sensibly."

You can never underestimate the importance of obedience in the medical system as we know it. Without people willing to follow their doctors' orders, it would collapse overnight. Almost.

I say "almost" because the research on patient behaviour around prescription drugs finds that most of us are already fairly skilled at disobeying our doctors' orders. Take the statins for example;

opening a drug, and even more on convincing people to use it. Now it has to work hard to get people to keep taking it because "non-compliant" patients represent a potentially huge loss of profits.

Strategies to improve compliance or adherence basically reduce peoples' involvement in their own healthcare to one dimension: Following orders. Whenever I read about or hear discussions around the use of medication and the word compliance shows up, I suspect that Pharma is lurking somewhere nearby.

The research on type-2 diabetes and patient self-management finds that, of all the things they are ordered to do, patients are much more likely to follow their prescribed medication regimen and

sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure.

Is it possible that our family doctors aren't ordering more tests or dishing out the full array of drugs we are told diabetics need because they have a little compliance problem of their own? Or maybe both doctors and patients are acting rationally.

Ignoring treatment advice that exposes us to the risk of significant adverse effects, and which makes little difference to the overall length and quality of our lives (and costs a ton of money), might be entirely acceptable. In type-2 diabetes, for example, advice about getting us to eat better and forcing us off our butts to exercise more holds many more rewards than getting us to obsess over our blood

pressure or cholesterol. And, by the way, the fact that doctors generally bypass non-drug approaches to diabetes merits a mention by the Health Council: "Less than half of Canadian family physicians report that they refer their patients with diabetes to support services, such as nutrition and fitness counselling."

Here, however, docs aren't being non-compliant. Perhaps they are just being pragmatic. Generally, provincial medical services plans don't pay for lifestyle modification for diabetes patients. Identified a new diabetic in your practice? Great. A free sample of Lipitor might be the only thing you can think of to get him out the door.

continued on p. 31

You can never underestimate the importance of obedience in the medical system as we know it. Without people willing to follow their doctors' orders, it would collapse overnight.

Almost. I say "almost" because... most of us are already fairly skilled at disobeying our doctors' orders.

drugs like Lipitor that lower cholesterol and are among the biggest-selling drugs on the planet. Most people don't take them for very long. Research studies from around the world show that only about half the patients prescribed statins continue taking them for more than six months, and within a year only one third are still taking the drug.

In February, James Le Fanu, famed author of *The Rise and Fall of Modern Medicine* (1999), published an article in the *Sunday Telegraph*, relating the story of one of his patients who took a holiday and forgot to take his statins for three weeks. Seemed like the 74-year-old's aches and pains improved so much he decided that a permanent statin holiday was in order. Le Fanu doesn't pull any punches when he writes, "Statins are useless for 95 percent of those taking them, while exposing all to the hazard of serious side-effects." So if you find yourself stopping the Lipitor or the Crestor your doctor insists you need, there is one thing you can be fairly sure of: You aren't alone.

This defiant behaviour deeply worries the pharmaceutical industry and it spends no small amount of energy and research money on trying to improve your "compliance" or "adherence" and to otherwise get you to keep taking your pills. You can imagine things from its perspective: It has spent millions devel-

least likely to follow advice on lifestyle changes around diet and exercise.

Why is this? Well, it's understandable from the patient's perspective: If there are a bunch of orders your doctor has given you, you're likely to do the easiest thing first: Take your drugs. It doesn't help if your doctor isn't very good at motivating you or knows very little about nutrition or exercise; doctors get little training in either area.

Yet, for type-2 diabetes, this may be the most irrational thing to do. The best evidence suggests that diet and exercise, unlike the drugs that only modify your blood glucose or cholesterol levels, are proven to go a lot further, improving your overall health and well-being in many different ways.

There's evidence of non-compliance in the diabetes world, but not only from the patients; it also comes from doctors. The Health Council of Canada recently issued a report entitled *Why Health Care Renewal Matters: Lessons from Diabetes*, decrying the state of diabetes care in Canada. Among the sins listed was the fact that "Less than half of Canadians with diabetes get all the lab tests and procedures recommended." Rightfully citing the sorry state of eye exams (which doctors aren't performing enough to prevent the real-life complications of diabetes), the report also mentions the need for regular monitoring of blood

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Vegetarian dinners made easy

NUTRISPEAK Vesanto Melina MS, RD

Including more plant-based meals and “going” organic is a gift to both future generations and to our planet. This month, we help you add some healthful, delicious and simple meals to your menu planner.

Does making a vegetarian dinner seem too daunting a challenge? In fact, revolutionizing your diet can be

- Split pea soup is equally delicious when it’s entirely vegetarian. Use vegetarian soup stock powder or cubes for added depth of flavour
- A great taco combination can be made with refried beans, sprouts, chopped avocado and tomato
- A scrumptious version of Shepherd’s Pie (see recipe)

Does making a vegetarian dinner seem too daunting a challenge?

In fact, revolutionizing your diet can be easy.

easy. Most of us rely on eight or nine favourite recipes that we return to again and again. Think of your favourites; they likely make up a short list. Here is a three-step plan to help you make a simple transition to vegetarianism by including veggie favourites already on your list.

1) Think of three meals you like that also happen to be vegetarian. How about these examples?

- Spaghetti with tomato mushroom sauce, tomato basil sauce or marinara sauce
- Vegetarian chili
- Bean burritos made with corn or wheat tortillas, mashed pinto beans, salsa, lettuce, chopped tomatoes, chopped olives or grated carrot

(With meat substitutes like vegetarian bacon slices, it’s simple to make a BLT; bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich.)

2) Modify three of your recipes:

3) Try three new recipes from *Becoming Vegetarian*, *Raising Vegetarian Children* or some other cookbook. Check out vegetarian cookbooks at the library and at bookstores. Have fun as you experiment with delightful new tastes and healthful ingredients.

When you’ve found your three new meals, you’ve done it! You’ve now got nine delicious, tasty choices. Earth will thank you, the animals will thank you and your body will thank you too. When you go out for dinner, check out restaurants at www.veg dining.com.

Vesanto Melina is a registered dietitian in Langley BC. She is co-author of seven classics about food and nutrition and offers consultations for health and dietary transitions. www.nutrispeak.com, vesanto@nutrispeak.com, 604-882-6782.

HEALTH

Shepherd’s Pie

This classic comfort food from *Becoming Vegetarian* (Melina and Davis, Wiley Canada, 2003) may stir fond memories from childhood. It has a dark, rich, meaty-flavoured bottom layer, a middle layer of bright-yellow corn and a smooth topping of mashed potato. Use either a combination of creamed corn and corn niblets or one or the other. Makes 10 cups (eight servings of 1-1/4 cups).

Potato topping

- 8 large russet potatoes, peeled (4 lbs)
- 3-4 tbsp olive oil (45-60 ml)
- ½ cup fortified soymilk or rice milk (125 ml)
- ½ tsp salt (2 ml)
- ¼ tsp white or black pepper (1 ml)

Pie mixture

- 12 oz (two packages) Yves Veggie Ground Round (680 g)
- 2-2/3 cups onion, diced (670 ml)
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1-1/2 cups chopped celery (375 ml)
- 1 tbsp olive oil (15 ml)
- 2 tbsp and 2 tsp vegetarian Worcestershire sauce (i.e. Wizard) (40 ml)
- 2 tbsp tamari, Bragg liquid soy or soy sauce (30 ml)
- 1 tsp salt (optional) (2 ml)
- ½ tbsp tarragon (7 ml)
- 1 tsp thyme (5 ml)
- ½ tsp black pepper (2 ml)
- 14-oz can creamed corn (398 ml)
- 14-oz can corn niblets, drained (398 ml) or 1-1/2 cup frozen corn kernels, thawed (375 ml)
- ¼ tsp paprika (1 ml)

Preheat oven to 350°F (177°C). Cut each potato into thirds and cook in boiling water until tender. Meanwhile, in skillet, sauté onion, garlic and celery in oil over medium-high heat until soft. Turn off heat, add crumbled Yves Veggie Ground Round, Worcestershire sauce, tamari, salt (if using), tarragon, thyme, pepper and mix thoroughly. Transfer Veggie Ground Round mixture to a casserole dish (9 by 13-inch or 23 by 33 cm), sprayed or lightly oiled. Spread mixture and pack evenly. Mix creamed corn and corn kernels together. Spread corn mixture over Veggie Ground Round mixture. Drain potatoes. Add oil, soymilk, salt and pepper and mash until fluffy. Spread potato topping evenly over corn. Sprinkle top with paprika and bake for 20 minutes or until heated through.

Per cup (250 ml): Calories: 262; protein: 6 g; fat: 6 g; carbohydrates: 48 g; dietary fibre: 5 g; calcium: 56 mg; iron: 1.9 mg; magnesium: 54 mg; sodium: 627 mg; zinc: 1.4 mg; folate: 51 mcg; vitamin C: 37 mg.



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The tagline for the new and completely non-existent drug, Havidol, says it all. Go ahead, have a fine time (avafynetyne). You deserve it, don't you? You deserve all the good things life has to offer. Increasingly, prescription drugs are developed and sold that may be more about enhancing lifestyles than about saving lives. With the objective of calling the marketing and advertising tactics of the pharmaceutical industry to task, Australian interdisciplinary artist Justine Cooper, now based in Brooklyn, NY, created a fictional marketing campaign for Havi-

dol, an equally fictional, magic-bullet, lifestyle pharmaceutical, launched for the treatment of the imaginary dysphoric social attention consumption deficit anxiety disorder (DSACDAD).

Havidol is a frightening approximation of the real thing. Parody gives way to possibility with Cooper's re-creation of the drug marketing process, from the invention of a new disorder, wherein a need is identified and a disorder created to fit it, to the branding process, the creation of a pill, logo and promotional materials, the website design and finally, TV and print advertising.

While tapping into our collective desire for and expectation that there is always room for improvement, the marketing strategy for Havidol walks the line between poking fun at us and making some of us wonder how to obtain a prescription. The underlying message leaves us with the sense that we are never good enough and will never have enough. Havidol is an artful spoof of a new type of gold rush heralding an era in which pharmaceutical companies mine psych chemicals for a public who is ready to swallow almost anything in the pursuit of a life without pain – only gain.

Cooper's exhibits comment on our temperamental relationship with western medicine, which has been built upon the idea of a malfunctioning body or mind, and the yearning to believe that everyday life can be remedied. The artist's work has been internationally reviewed and exhibited and she is the recipient of an Australia Council Fellowship, a two-year, once in a lifetime prize awarded to an artist of outstanding achievement and potential.

Visit www.havidol.com and www.justinecooper.com.

Nature as therapy

by Toni Pieroni, MA, RCC



Many years ago, when I was going through a painful divorce, I would go for a run along the False Creek seawall towards Kits Beach in Vancouver. I had to get to the point where I could see the horizon before I could return home. At that moment of being able to see ahead to where the sky and sea met in the distance, I could feel the possibility of a future beyond my grief. During that time, I couldn't get enough of the outdoors, and the experience of being in the forest was as essential to me as breathing and eating.

A few years later, I celebrated my 50th birthday in the company of friends and family, including my ex-husband. My world felt whole and I knew that the next phase of my life would be about giving back, which led me to volunteer at the David Suzuki Foundation. I wanted to do my part to protect the forest that had held me. It was there that I learned about Theodore Roszak's book *The Voice of the Earth*, which laid the groundwork for a new field within psychology, eco-psychology, which recognizes that healing ourselves and healing our world are interrelated – that who we are is deeply interconnected with all of life; we are not separate from it.

Reading Roszak's book, I realized how important and therapeutic my experiences in the forest had been, and still were. The natural world is a living system, in which everything relates to

everything else. Nothing, including us, exists in isolation. Nature's cycles teach us about the creative, restorative and self-renewing aspects of life, enlivening us and confronting us with the profound mysteries of life. It is uplifting and breathtaking to know that we are much more than we think we are.

As a therapist, I often support my clients to construct a place in their imagination to help them feel grounded, calm and safe. Frequently, the images that clients spontaneously come up with are derived from nature. It happens so often that I didn't think much of it, until I began to study eco-psychology and became more curious about why nature was so therapeutic and healing.

I see healing as a function of connection. Psychotherapy endeavours to heal the splits in our minds (psyches), bodies and spirits. Eco-therapy, the application of the principals of eco-psychology, includes direct encounters with the natural world in a conscious and experiential way to enable a deeper connection with the body. A direct experience with nature begins with our body and our senses; during eco-therapy exercises, one works with conscious intention to create a container, within which the healing and transformational aspects of being in nature can take place.

During one eco-psychology training session at Mosquito Creek near North Vancouver, I was struggling with letting go of something that I seemed to be

obsessively holding onto. I sat near the water and imagined this particular issue attached to a water molecule floating downstream, eventually finding its way to the ocean. I repeated the experience over and over until I knew it had completely left my body. I could feel that it was no longer attached to me and had mingled with the vastness of the ocean. I don't even remember what the issue was, but I certainly remember the simple power of the exercise.

Eco-psychology includes the perspective that the symptoms clients present in therapy are not separate from the "dis-ease" we see in our societies and our planet. Mother Earth is suffering and her children are symptom carriers. One simple exercise consists of imagining a world in which our air, water and soil are free of toxic substances and that

py, healing occurs by facing, feeling and working through the emotions connected to injuries and traumas that occur in our relationships. Some call this work "planetary therapy" as the healing process includes our participation in the world.

Eco-psychology recognizes the uniqueness of the individual. Just as in nature, where no two snowflakes are alike, our individual differences as people create the diversity and complexity necessary to sustain life. I had a profound experience of this following a workshop in which the facilitator spoke about Einstein's surprise at the concept of an expanding universe. Riding my bike one beautiful, sunny day, I saw new buds on the outer branches of trees. I realized that I was seeing the creativity of life and the ongoing evolution of the expanding universe in those buds. I then saw every-

Eco-psychology includes the perspective that the symptoms clients present in therapy are not separate from the "dis-ease" we see in our societies and our planet. Mother Earth is suffering and her children are symptom carriers.

our sources of energy, including the sun, do not endanger us. Imagine families, communities and nations living together in peaceful and collaborative ways. Imagine a sense of the sacred infusing our lives with meaning and purpose. Reflecting deeply on this vision, I am freed from a level of chronic stress that is present in my psyche like background noise, and which activates the survival response in my brain.

Stress is seen as causal or contributory in most physical and mental illnesses. Yet traditional psychology seldom makes the link beyond a family system perspective. When we come to know that we *are* nature – we are the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food that comes from the Earth's soil and the energy that fuels our bodies – we begin to heal an illusory split in our consciousness. That shift can spark us to develop a life-sustaining relationship with the Earth.

As a volunteer, I helped document the Suzuki Foundation's video library and spent hours watching footage of the degradation of the environment. I was often in tears and felt a sense of despair. That experience prompted me to study with eco-philosopher and Buddhist scholar Joanna Macy who originally used the words "despair and empowerment" to describe her work with groups. According to Joanna, "The greatest danger of all is the deadening of our response to the condition of our world." In psychothera-

thing in nature, including myself, as an expression of this evolution.

In every moment, through our thoughts, feelings and actions, we are creating our world. That day, I knew in that moment that I had a place in this world, and that what I did made a difference, for better or worse. Since then, life has felt purposeful and alive in a way I had never experienced before. Those tree buds taught me about who I am, and who we all are.

Being in nature often connects people to their spiritual source – not by their transcending life on Earth, but by their becoming more deeply connected with it. It is the place where many people find God, spirit, and the source. This is the wisdom that is gleaned from nature: The fruit of one's actions has its own time frame, sometimes not seen in one's own lifetime. A date tree does not produce fruit for 80 years. Someone who plants a date tree today will not likely ever witness the fruit of her labours. Yet she knows that if she does not plant the seed, the fruit will not grow. It is a matter of deep time, and having faith and trust in the process of life itself.

Toni Pieroni is a registered clinical counsellor in private practice. She works with individuals and couples and co-leads group retreats and eco-psychology workshops. She also sits on the board for the Earth Revival Society. www.counsellingbc.com/listings/tpieroni.htm

It's a wonder full world

by Bruce Sanguin

Forfeit awe and the world becomes a marketplace. – Rabbi Abraham Heschel

If you want to gain a sense of the wonder of the world, take a walk with a two-year-old. Do not be in a hurry. I learned this with my own daughter. Every twig and blade of grass was an occasion for her to squat down and take a real good look. Without the same agenda-driven, caffeine-infused urgency of her father, a bug struggling through the forest of grass was an opportunity for relationship. I remember the monk-like, single-minded attention she bestowed upon this creature. Similarly, a piece of coloured glass stopped her in her tracks for a good five minutes, as she turned it over and over in the sun to capture the changing colours. An hour passed and we hadn't progressed even a block. Such is the enchantment of two-year-olds for the natural world.

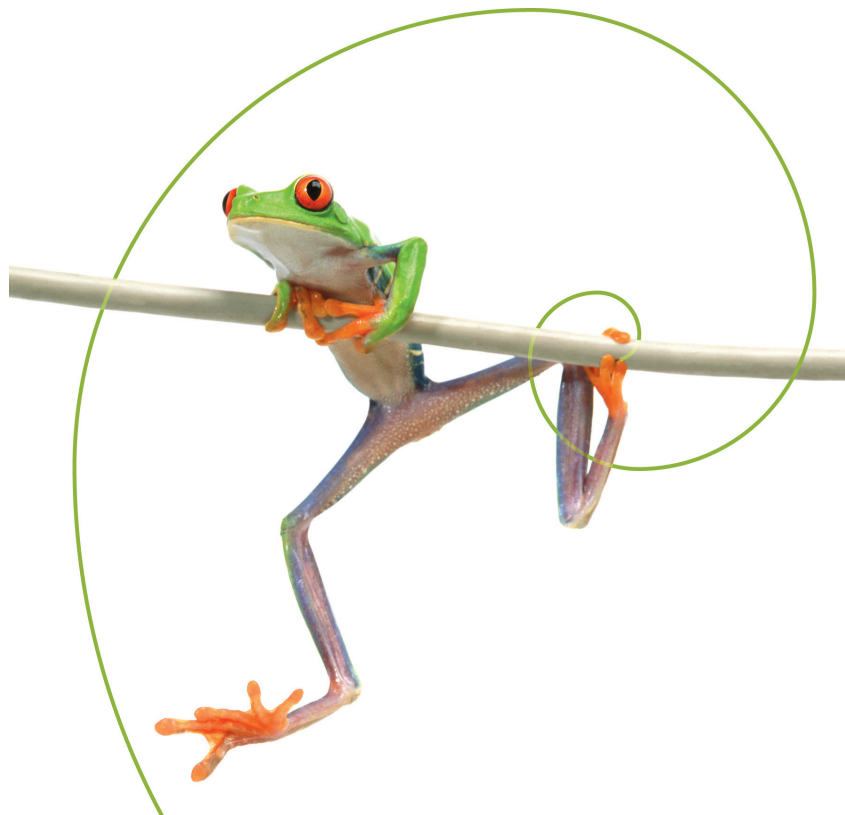
It takes a good 15 to 20 years for our educational system to wean people from wonder, to demystify and disenchant the universe. This weaning from wonder is a travesty. I remember learning about the life of cells in biology. I had to memorize the various parts of a cell: the nucleus, the organelles, the DNA and RNA, the membrane and later, some of the chemical interactions necessary to produce energy. I learned this stuff because there was "going to be a test." After completing the test, most of the information simply disappeared from my memory. I didn't retain it because it wasn't taught as a source of wonder. A cell was a collection of parts, which worked together like a machine. Furthermore, despite the fact that my own body was made of 50 trillion of these tiny energy fields, I was not helped to make a connection between my own body and its cellular composition. I could go down the list of subjects on the curriculum and tell the same story.

I struggled with math, for example, not because I couldn't learn the formulas, but because none of my teachers could answer my question, "Why do I have to learn math?" No one could tell me. Because I was a "good" boy, I learned the bare minimum. For ancient Greeks, mathematics was revelatory. It was how they accessed invisible forms behind the visible forms of creation. They had a passion for dealing with first principles. Through math, they plumbed the elegance and mystery of the universe. Modern theoretical physics confirms their ancient intuition. The elegance and beauty of a mathematical formula is the primary predictor of whether it will correspond to reality. My grade 12 math teacher first bored me nearly to death, and then threw me out of the class on a regular basis for being restless (for which I am truly grateful).

I chose my undergraduate university because it had the best volleyball team in Canada. The pedagogical methods in the post-secondary system were the same as in high school, except with more information. I received adequate grades, without ever really being interested in any of the subjects. I majored in psychology. The brand in vogue at the time was behavioural psychology. We spent a lot of time proving that B. F.

satellite television station called *Baby TV*, which targets six-month-olds to two-year-olds! In other words, from the age of six months, our children are initiated into the culture of television, the medium of choice for advertisers.

Virtually nothing is sacred to advertisers, other than selling products. The industry will appropriate any image in order to initiate our children into the cult of consumerism. The power and



Skinner was right. We could control the behaviour of rats in a laboratory through a system of rewards and punishments. By extension, my professor assured me, human beings could be reduced to the sum total of rewards and punishments received for particular behaviours. He encouraged us to practise our rat-training techniques on our girlfriends. So much for wonder. Our volleyball team, on the other hand, was doing quite well.

A recent study has shown that children are more likely to be able to identify the 10 top corporate jingles and brands than name the planets in our solar system. This, perhaps, should not surprise us. Brian Swimme asks where and how we are initiated into the universe. For primal peoples, it happened in caves, through vision quests and sacred stories told around the campfire. Today, our children are initiated into the universe through television and video games. Ancient chants have been replaced by corporate jingles. By the time a child enters first grade, she has ingested some 30,000 advertisements. Children are being systematically initiated into a worldview of commercialism and capitalism. There's a new 24-hour

mystery of sexuality is exploited to sell every conceivable product, from cars to mattresses to clothing to vacuum cleaners. Previously mysterious and sacred symbols are reduced to mere "hooks" designed to encourage us to buy. These symbols hook us because we retain ancient memories of them. So today, Eternity is a perfume. We don't drive cars; we are transported by Infinitis, Mysteres and Allures. Our relationship with the planets is reduced to the Mercury or Saturn that carries us to work. Babies sell car tires and toilet paper. Corporations have caught on to our fascination with animals. Lizards, monkeys, sheep, toucans, hippos and many other species, including those on the verge of extinction, are exploited for their attention-galvanizing power. Literally nothing is sacred in this new religion, into which we are initiating our children.

We are living through a modern-day version of the story of the golden calf in *Exodus*. In the story, the Hebrew people have escaped the slavery they endured under the Egyptian pharaoh. They find themselves in the desert, starving and looking impatiently for signs that God is with them. In their desperation, while

Moses is away, up a mountain receiving some divine instruction, they gather up all the gold and silver they possess and make out of it a golden calf. In the absence of any God they can perceive, they appropriate the symbol of the god of the dominant culture. They remove all their jewellery and cast it into a fire, to be melted and reformed into an idol.

So today, in a universe devoid of awe and wonder, we are ripe for the picking. Our children and youth, particularly, are susceptible to the allurements of the materialism and commercialism of dominant culture. Advertising imbues products with the numinous powers of gods and goddesses. It promises that we can participate directly in the good life, through an orgy of consumption. When Moses confronts Aaron, the priest who supervised the forging of the golden calf, Aaron lamely denies responsibility. He tells Moses that he instructed the people to throw their jewellery into the fire, and presto, "Out came this calf!" (Gen.32:24).

We are the Hebrew people, disenchanted with the world into which we have been initiated. Yet, we are hard-wired for sacred mystery, the capacity to know that we are accompanied in our journey through this universe by the Spirit of God. We are, therefore, susceptible to golden calves of all shapes and sizes. Only the names, voided of sacred essence, remain. We find ourselves revelling in an orgy of consumption, which is destroying our planet and denying our souls the deeper meaning and purpose for which we hunger. Marketing geniuses are the high priests of our corporate culture. As contemporary incarnations of Aaron, they deny responsibility for the golden calf of consumerism. After all, they tell us, they are just giving us what we want. And we, the citizenry, also deny responsibility, since our primary civic duty apparently consists of shopping, as President Bush reminded the American people on national television after 9-11. Get thee to Disneyland!

see sidebar on p. 23

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Free concert and book launch with Bruce Sanguin

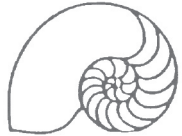
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Bear necessities by Barbara Murray

Spring has arrived along with the tulips, daffodils and *Symplocarpus foetidus*. Why do I mention *Symplocarpus foetidus*, better known as skunk cabbage? After emerging from their dens, bears go in search of skunk cabbage to kick-start their system after a few months of hibernation. When the



Bear expert Charlie Russell in Kamchatka. Photo by Maureen Enns.

pungent aroma of skunk cabbage wafts through the forest, there are sure to be bears around.

As to why some bear families end up down the mountain amongst humans, survival is the motivating factor. Mother bears, with their cubs, make the trek to avoid predatory and amorous male bears who, without ready access to single females, have been known to kill young cubs, thereby rendering the female fertile and ready to mate within a couple of

weeks. And bears of both genders move down in search of food. After losing up to 40 percent of their body weight while sleeping, they are anxious to pack it back on again before the next denning season when they will lose it all again. This is especially important for a female bear carrying a fertilized egg in May or June; the egg will not implant in the fall unless she has reached a healthy body weight.

Bears are opportunistic feeders and are attracted to food sources that require the least amount of energy to obtain, namely garbage, bird feed, ripened fruit – on trees or on the ground – and food from outdoor freezers. Please do not encourage bears in your area by making it easy for them to access food. “Nuisance” bears do not fare well in towns and suburbs, and the consequences are likely to be deadly, so please secure or remove all unnatural food sources from your yards and driveways.

Barbara Murray is the vice chair of the North Shore Spring Bear Festival Society. The Vancouver North Shore hosts its first *Bear Fest 2007*, April 23-29. Internationally-renowned bear experts Charlie Russell and Benjamin Kilham present *An Evening of Bear Talk*, April 27, 7pm, at the Kay Meek Centre. Call 604-913-3634 for tickets. Events include the festival finale in Ambleside Park on April 29, 10am-4pm. Visit www.northshore-bearfest.com or email bearfest@shaw.ca for information.

Conversations with Neale Donald Walsch

In 1993, Neale Donald Walsch's life changed forever. After a series of down-turns in his private life, including an accident that left him with a broken neck, Walsch found himself without a job and homeless.

In a moment of total surrender and desperation, he asked God this question: “What does it take to make life work?” So began *Conversations with God*, a series of books that has been translated into 34 languages.

Modern-day, spiritual messenger Neale Donald Walsch continues to touch the world in profound and healing ways. Both universal and personal, the communications in *Conversation with God* are all the more pertinent and urgent, given the critical state of the world, the destruction of our environment and the breaking down of our personal and global relationships.

At this pivotal time, we are called upon to change our ideas about ourselves, our world and about God. Walsch has created the non-profit organization, Humanity's Team, to help galvanize



people into action. Founded upon the principle of bridge-building, Humanity's Team seeks to produce an understanding in which humanity can create a “New Spirituality,” based on God's unconditional love for all humanity and life itself.

It is simply an expansion, an updating and a renewal of existing theologies and sacred teachings and an opportunity for each of us to have our own direct and personal conversation with God.

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Sunday April 29th, Vancouver Croatian Cultural Centre, 3250 Commercial Drive. Tickets at Banyen Books. Call 604-737-8858 or visit online at www.humanitysteamcanada.com.

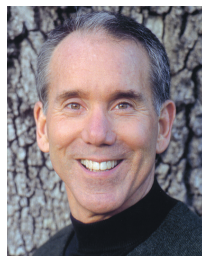
Dan Millman on personal leadership

Dan Millman made his mark in the human potential movement in 1980 when he published *Way of the Peaceful Warrior*. His 12 additional books have been translated into 29 languages.

Millman based the book on personal life experience; as a young man, he was a champion gymnast and won the 1964 world trampoline championship in London and served as co-captain of the NCAA University of California gymnastics team in 1968.

The book tells the story of a successful, young gymnast who is dogged by a sense of emptiness. Late one night, he has a chance meeting with a gas station attendant who becomes his mentor and spiritual guide. *Way of the Peaceful Warrior* chronicles the character's spiritual odyssey and presents the idea of how one may evolve into a peaceful warrior.

Millman notes that the book addresses



life's bigger picture and our capacity to achieve our highest potential. In 2006, it was made into a film, *Peaceful Warrior*, starring Nick Nolte. The film had a first-run circuit in Canada and opened across the US at the end of March.

Millman presents the keynote address at The Haven Institute's *Fourth International Symposium: Personal Leadership in the Real World*, Friday, April 13, 7:30 PM, Marriott Pinnacle, 1128 W. Hastings St., Vancouver. A free screening of *Peaceful Warrior* follows. On April 14, the event moves to SFU Harbour Centre Campus, 515 W. Hastings St., Vancouver. For information, visit www.haven.ca. Email registrar@haven.ca or call 1-877-247-9238 (ext. 234).

Eagleridge fallout by Ned Jacobs



Betty Krawczyk
Photo: Eagleridge Bluffs Coalition

Throughout the 39-day blockade at Eagleridge Bluffs last spring, BC Minister of Transportation Kevin Falcon and West Vancouver MLA Joan McIntyre spun it so that the protesters appeared to be a small group of wealthy NIMBYs worried about property values. Even as poll results showed that 80 percent of the people in the district were opposed to the Olympics-related highway diversion, mainstream media bought the lie, and many potential allies were turned off by reverse class prejudice. Twenty-four citizens were arrested and hundreds of thousands of carbon-sequestering trees and shrubs bit the dust. Tragically, they constituted some of the rarest and most biologically diverse ecosystems in Canada.

In February of this year, 500 people attended *Standing up for Nature*, a benefit concert to raise money towards the costs of appealing the injunction. Two great-grandmothers were notably absent: Harriet Nahanee died of pneumonia

soon after her release from Surrey Pre-trial Centre, where BC Supreme Court Madam Justice Brown had incarcerated the frail Pacheedaht Nation Elder for refusing to recognize the court's authority over unceded land. A petition calling for a public inquiry into her sentence is underway. Betty Krawczyk was also in that hell-hole, starting a 10-month sentence in her quest to stop the use of injunctions that deprive citizens of their rights under the criminal code. She is currently at the Alouette Correctional Centre for Women in Maple Ridge.

The Crown Attorney declined to prosecute the other arrestees, citing insufficient evidence of criminal contempt. The defendants faced a Hobson's choice: contest civil contempt and be hit with stiff fines, in addition to an excess of \$10,000 each in court costs, or settle with Sea to Sky Highway Project's P3 (public-private partnership) lawyers. They negotiated, partly out of concern that heavy penalties could frighten others from resisting injunctions in the future.

The Coalition to Save Eagleridge Bluffs is not going away, and a portion of the concert proceeds will support new environmental initiatives. We are determined to keep the story of Eagleridge and BC's broken Olympic promise alive so that our loss will be a turning point for the restoration of justice.

Operation Doing-Time: Sentence Yourself to Community Service! invites citizens to register their estimated hours of service for a wide range of causes at www.eagleridgebluffs.ca/dotime.

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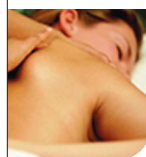
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BC sets hot air standards

EARTHFUTURE Guy Dauncey

Last year, I gather that three things happened to make Gordon Campbell wake up to the enormous scale of global climate change. He saw Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth*; he read Tim Flannery's book *The Weather Makers*; and he went to China in November, where he was shocked at the extent of China's air pollution, and its vulnerability to sea level rise as a result of climate change.

He also received hundreds of letters from BC citizens imploring him to act on climate change and urging him to cancel the plans for the coal-fired power plants. Climate change, after all, is the second greatest collective threat that human civilization has ever faced, after nuclear war, and BC's inaction has been unconscionable.

It was with the greatest delight, therefore, that I heard the commitments to tackle the challenge in the throne speech

cross the Port Mann Bridge every day. If every driver had to pay a \$10 toll on incoming trips, evidence from London, England, where the toll for entering the city centre is \$18, shows that traffic would be reduced by around 20 percent. The toll would generate \$500,000 per day that could be used to expand transit, cycling facilities and other trip reduction strategies.

A typical commuter coach costs \$100 per hour to operate, so if a return trip from Vancouver to the suburbs takes two and a half hours, the cost is \$250 per coach. With \$500,000 a day in income, using simple back-of-the-napkin math, this would pay for 2,000 coaches. If each coach carries 40 commuters, sitting in comfort around a table for four with space for a laptop, newspaper and coffee, that's 80,000 commuters a day. A coach uses 15 times less space than the same number of people driving on

**We all live with ironies and contradictions as we continue to
use fossil fuels while knowing that we need to stop.**

in February. Both coal-fired power plants are gone and we are to reduce our emissions by 33 percent below today's level by 2020, or 10 percent below the 1990 level. Europe's goal is 20 percent below 1990 by 2020, but it's a good start.

In the weeks after the throne speech, and the energy plan that followed it, the critics had a field day. It's true that if we want to poke holes in the new commitments, it is easy to do. The \$4 billion Gateway program, with new roads and bridges that are guaranteed to increase traffic and greenhouse gas emissions, is still going ahead. In the budget, there was 10 times more money for oil and gas than for renewables. How can such a commitment be real if it contains such huge contradictions?

In my bones, however, I feel that the commitment is genuine. We all live with ironies and contradictions as we continue to use fossil fuels while knowing that we need to stop. The BC Liberal government is no exception.

So what should our agenda be now that the government has set these new goals? One of our focuses must be changing the Gateway program so that plans for new roads and bridges are scrapped, to be replaced with a toll on the Port Mann Bridge and other key points of entry into Vancouver.

Approximately 127,000 vehicles

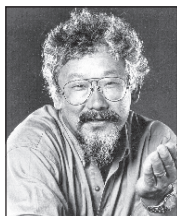
their own in cars. Give the coaches a dedicated lane, and hey presto, the road congestion is solved.

All the government needs to do is borrow the money to expand our transit system and create more cycling and ride-sharing programs in advance of the toll, and the need for new bridges and roads will disappear. Since a coach produces eight and a half times less CO₂ per passenger than a car, the amount of greenhouse gases associated with commuting will also decline.

Let me be unhesitatingly clear. This crisis of global climate change is every bit as bad as you fear. The urgency is critical. Top global scientists warn of a possible four-metre sea level rise this century. The last time I looked, Richmond, Delta, New Westminster and the Vancouver International Airport were all less than four metres above sea level. We have no time to lose by being cynical.

Finally, BC's premier has taken the lead and set the highest standards for greenhouse gas reduction in North America. Now, we all need to become engaged.

Guy Dauncey is president of the BC Sustainable Energy Association (www.bcsea.org) and author of *Stormy Weather: 101 Solutions to Global Climate Change*, New Society Publishers, 2001. www.earthfuture.com.



If you were prime minister

SCIENCE MATTERS David Suzuki

Exhaustion. Exhilaration. Self-doubt. It seems like I've been assailed by these emotions daily on my cross-Canada bus tour. With up to three speaking events a day, along with a constant barrage of media interviews, punctuated by hours of driving on the open road, the emotional peaks and valleys are truly draining. But of this much I am certain: This is a great country.

Looking out across the vast, wind-blown blanket of snow on the Prairies is hypnotic. And yet I can't help think that in spite of the vastness of this land, Canadians seem to share a common set of values that I have been lucky enough to have experienced firsthand.

Canadians, I have learned, have a profound love of their land and natural spaces.

And they want to take care of them for their children and grandchildren. They feel like they are already seeing the early stages of global warming and are concerned about what it will mean for the future. They want to help do their part. And they have an innate sense of fairness

that we should all be doing our share. The passion with which people have expressed their views has been overwhelming at times, but these stories are the very reason why we did this tour.

It started with a seed of an idea. Long before TV, cars or cell phones, entertainers would load a tent and all their regalia on wagons and move from town to town. When their tents went up, people gathered to share ideas as well as music, acrobatics and theatre. Eventually, a permanent site for annual gatherings was established in Chautauqua, New York, and it became a magnet for people wanting to engage in public discourse.

A few years ago, I began to float a modified version of Chautauqua. Why not take our ideas on the road, I suggested, going to communities to find out peoples' concerns and talk about emerging global environmental issues? The idea took root early this year, as over the past year reports about water shortages, fires, floods, heat waves and hurricanes showed us that such problems were no longer just happening somewhere else; they were happening at home too.

As the Inuit have been telling us, global warming can no longer be seen

ENVIRONMENT

as a slow motion catastrophe; they are seeing it happen in the Arctic right now. In addition, Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, had an explosive impact on the public psyche, while books like Tim Flannery's *The Weather Makers* and George Monbiot's *Heat* ramped up public awareness and concern about climate change.

We started planning, but we knew we couldn't just blow through communities; we needed the conversation to carry on after we left. Our hope was to act as a catalyst to conversation, a dialogue about community and provincial, federal and international issues, starting

at the local level. We contacted local community groups in cities along our proposed route and asked whether they would partner with us. Those local organizations have been amazing and critical to the success of the tour.

When we set off from St. John's, we had no idea what

to expect. But the response has been incredible. To date, we have recorded hundreds of video testimonies from people telling us what they would do for the environment if they were prime minister. And we have collected thousands of votes for the environment.

Sustained applause and intense discussion during the question and answer sessions indicates to me a hunger for such discourse and a desire for real action from our political leaders. So, here we are, nearing the end of the tour, having met with people across this vast country. It's an experience I wish I could share with everyone because it has changed my life. In March, I celebrate my 71st year filled with a new hope and optimism for the people of this country.

David Suzuki ended his cross-country, 30-day, 41-event marathon for the environment on February 28, in front of Terry Fox's statue at Mile Zero in Victoria where he shared a message of hope: "Hope is what sustains me; we can never give up hope or stop believing that we can be part of the solution." Learn more about the If You Were Prime Minister tour at www.davidsuzuki.org.

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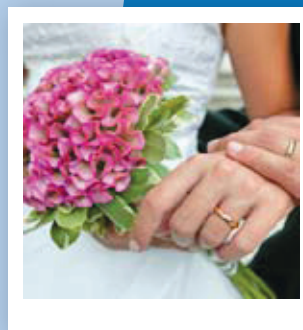
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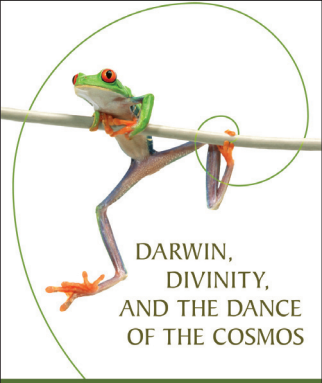
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*We come to love not by finding a perfect person,
but by learning to see an imperfect person perfectly.*
— Unknown —



Everything is alive

THE POWER OF NOW Eckhart Tolle

In the Bible, God declares, "I am the Alpha and the Omega and I am the living One." In the timeless realm where God dwells, which is also your home, the beginning and the end – the Alpha and the Omega – are one.

The essence of everything that has ever been and ever will be is eternally present in an unmanifest state of oneness and perfection. In our world of seemingly separate forms, however, timeless perfection is an inconceivable concept. Here, even consciousness, which is the light emanating from the eternal source, seems to be subject to a process of development, but this is due to our limited perception. It is not so in absolute terms.

Everything that exists has "Being," God-essence and some degree of consciousness. Even a stone has rudimentary consciousness. Otherwise, its atoms and molecules would disperse. Every-

of forms until it completely loses itself in them. Present-day human consciousness is completely identified with its disguise. It only knows itself as form and, therefore, lives in fear of the annihilation of its physical or psychological form. This is the egoic mind where considerable dysfunction sets in. It now looks as if something had gone very wrong somewhere along the line of evolution. But even this is part of *Lila*, the divine game.

Finally, the pressure of suffering created by this apparent dysfunction forces consciousness to awaken and become unidentified with form. It regains self-consciousness, but at a far deeper level than before it lost it.

This process is explained by Jesus in his parable of the lost son who leaves his father's home, squanders his wealth, becomes destitute and is forced to return home. When he does, his father loves

Everything that exists has "Being," God-essence and some degree of consciousness. Even a stone...

thing is alive: The sun, earth, plants, animals and humans. All are expressions of consciousness in varying degrees, consciousness manifesting as form.

The world arises when consciousness takes on thought forms and material forms. Look at the millions of life forms on this planet alone, replicated millions of times. To what end? Is someone or something playing a game with form? This is what the ancient seers of India asked themselves. They saw the world as *Lila*, a kind of divine game that God plays. Individual life forms are obviously not very important in this game.

In the sea, most life forms don't survive more than a few minutes after birth. The human form turns to dust pretty quickly too. When it is gone, it is as if it had never been. Is that tragic and cruel? Only if you create a separate identity for each form and forget that its consciousness is God-essence expressing itself in form. But you don't truly know that until you realize your own God-essence as pure consciousness.

If a fish is born in your aquarium and you call him John, write out a birth certificate, tell him about his family history and two minutes later he gets eaten by another fish, that's tragic. But it's only tragic because you projected a separate self where there was none.

Consciousness takes on the disguise

him more than before. The son's state is the same and yet not the same as it was. It has an added dimension of depth. The parable describes a journey from unconscious perfection, through apparent imperfection and "evil," to conscious perfection.

Can you now see the deeper and wider significance of becoming present as the watcher of your mind? Whenever you watch the mind, you withdraw consciousness from mind forms and it becomes what we call the watcher or the witness. Consequently, the watcher – pure consciousness beyond form – becomes stronger and the mental formations become weaker.

When we talk about watching the mind, we are personalizing an event that is truly of cosmic significance. Through you, consciousness is awakening from its dream of identification with form and withdrawing from form. This foreshadows, but is already part of, an event that is probably still in the distant future, as far as chronological time is concerned. The event is called the end of the world.

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Respect your neighbour

UNIVERSE WITHIN Gwen Randall-Young

Tolerance implies a gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one's own. — Gandhi

It is painful to witness the divisiveness occurring in our world. We see country against country, culture against culture and sect against sect. It is like a family in which there is such hostility that members end up killing one another. We all belong to the human family, after all. Unfortunately, it would seem that our global family is very dysfunctional.

Until I read the quote by Gandhi, noted above, I thought that tolerance and acceptance of each other was what was needed. It hit me like a ton of bricks. I realized that when we say we must be tolerant of other cultures or religious groups, it sounds as though we are being patient with something we would prefer not to have to deal with. We are tolerant

SPIRITUALITY

Muslim is a potential terrorist as it is to think every American is a disciple of George Bush. My guess is that the majority of people in the world want peace. They are not concerned with power, oil, wealth or control. They want enough to eat, clothing and shelter, healthcare and for their families to be safe. They do not want war or killing or to be driven from their homes or to live in fear.

We must find ways to understand and connect with these people all over the world and to communicate to them our sense of brotherhood. We need to show them we respect their beliefs, but we must understand them first.

Gandhi said, "It is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. If we are to respect others' religions as

It is as ludicrous to think that every Muslim is a potential terrorist as it is to think every American is a disciple of George Bush. My guess is that the majority of people in the world want peace.

of bad weather, noisy children and long waits at the doctor's office. How would we feel if we knew someone was merely tolerating us?

Of course there is some history to all of this. If generations have been taught that there is only one "right" way to be, only one way to Heaven and only one path to follow, and those who did not adhere to this path were called heathens or sinners, the way was paved for exclusion and condemnation of those who were "different."

Truth be told, the western world does seem to have a cultural superiority complex. It has been birthed, however, out of ignorance of the ways of other cultures and religions. With ignorance often comes fear. Bertrand Russell said, "Collective fear stimulates herd instinct and tends to produce ferocity toward those who are not regarded as members of the herd."

We see this within our own communities and on a global scale, where it becomes much more serious. Terrorism has shown us that the ferocious attacks no longer occur only along borders and are not aimed at only one country.

It is as ludicrous to think that every

we would have them respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty."

Typically, in our schools, children learn about the geography, politics and culture of other countries, but not about their citizens' religious beliefs. Why is this? If, early on, children learned about religious diversity, they would be able to develop an enlightened understanding. Respect, inclusiveness and a sense of equality would follow. How can we cultivate a respect for other religions if our children are being taught that theirs is the only "right" one?

It is possible for children to learn to be loyal to their own traditions while respecting other peoples' beliefs, but only if the adults around them model that behaviour. This seems a simple enough way to begin to create a more enlightened population, and long overdue.

Gwen Randall-Young is a psychotherapist in private practice and the author of Growing Into Soul: The Next Step in Human Evolution. For other articles and information about her books and CDs, visit www.gwen.ca. See display ad this issue.



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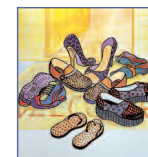
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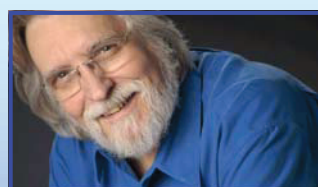
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Amazing Grace vs. The Host

FILMS WORTH WATCHING Robert Alstead

Last month marked Britain's 200th anniversary of the abolishment of the slave trade. In spite of growing awareness of the cruelty of slavery, there was huge resistance to the new law at the time; it had taken evangelical firebrand William Wilberforce and his band of reformers – nicknamed “angels” – years to overcome the resistance of the ruling classes to reach that momentous watershed. That episode in history is the inspiration for *Amazing Grace*, an optimistic account of how a few people can make a difference for the common good, through the courage of their convictions.

Directed by veteran Michael Apted, who made the excellent *Seven Up* documentary series and the Oscar-winning *Coal Miner's Daughter*, the parliamentary drama depicts Wilberforce's challenges – uncertainty about his vocation, being ravished by a painful physical condition and hit by severe setbacks – before he emerges ultimately victorious.

Critics have noted that while character development in *Amazing Grace*

is two-dimensional, with characters falling into either the “goodie” or “bad-die” camps, the film boasts a top-notch British cast. Welsh actor Ioan Gruffudd plays the zealous lead, whom on the urgings of his close friend Pitt the Younger – he became the youngest prime minister in Britain at 24 years old – chooses a life in politics over one of the cloth. The always remarkable Albert Finney plays reformed slaver John Newton, who, haunted by 20,000 souls, took religious vows and wrote hymns, among them the soulful *Amazing Grace*. Michael Gambon plays Whig leader Charles James Fox, Rufus Sewell is one of the key reformers and Senagalese singer Yousou N'Dour plays Oloudah Equiano, an ex-slave who wrote a widely-read autobiography detailing the horrors of the “Middle Passage” between Africa and the West Indies.

Gandhi, Jung and Beethoven crop up in the Kootenays in *The Naked Queen* (April 12 at The Ridge), a pro-*Cannabis* documentary that looks at a smorgasbord of issues around this much-

maligned plant. At times rambling and kooky with its historical imaginings and a recurring, naked goddess in the bush, it snaps back from ethereal contemplations on mystical and ancient *Cannabis* cultures and philosophical digressions on the condition of the US, to hear how some people, such as MS sufferers, benefit from the medicinal effects of *Cannabis* and how others find inspiration and solace from the weed.

It also points out why extraditing Canadian *Cannabis* campaigner Marc Emery would set a poor precedent for sovereignty in Canada. Emery comes across as a passionate and thoughtful individual; nothing like the sinister drug kingpin that the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) would have us believe he is. It's an overly-ambitious project, but I found the low-budget zaniness rather endearing. Emery, Michelle Rainey and Greg Williams (“the BC3”) are due to appear before the BC Supreme Court for a five-day hearing on May 28.

Having recently watched the bawdy Brit “zomcom” *Shaun of the Dead*, I found the more family-friendly, flesh-eating comedy *Fido*, which recently opened, a little flat and unoriginal. Fortunately for fans of *Shaun*, the same team is back this month with *Hot Fuzz*.

Just out, the South Korean creature-feature hit *The Host* starts off as an ecological, cautionary tale about the perils of pouring poison into your water sup-

ply, before moving firmly into monster B-movie territory as we follow a dysfunctional family chasing a mutant, man-killing amphibious monster into its lair in the sewers of Seoul. The laughs are plentiful, although it would have been nice if the monster had met a less obvious fate.

Finally, *Sharkwater* epitomizes pro-wildlife cameraman Rob Stewart's personal and passionate campaign to, as he notes, “help the sharks.” Stewart shows that sharks are desperately misunderstood, shy even, and not the man killers that mainstream mythology purports them to be. There are five human fatalities a year from shark attacks, while humans kill millions of sharks a year. They are hooked on long, baited lines, their dorsal and tail fins hacked off, before being thrown, bleeding and still alive, back into the water to sink to the ocean floor and die.

When Stewart joins eco-warrior Paul Watson on the Sea Shepherd, ramming shark poachers and fleeing from Costa Rican coast guards, you almost want to get out of your seat and cheer. Hopefully, Stewart's beautifully shot and disturbing film will help wake up the powers that be to do more to prevent the wanton plundering of the world's oceans.

Robert Alstead recently completed *You Never Bike Alone*, a documentary about Vancouver's Critical Masses. Get the DVD from www.youneverbikealone.com.



Spring's busy little bees

ON THE GARDEN PATH Carolyn Herriot

The pollination of flowers enables plants to bear fruit and set seed for future generations. Seventy-five percent of our food plants depend on being fertilized through pollination. Bees are Earth's number one pollinators, responsible for pollinating one third of the crops that feed us, so we should be concerned about protecting their well-being.

There are thousands of different bee species worldwide that fall into either the category of social bees, such as honey bees and bumble bees that live in hives, or solitary bees that live and nest alone. Solitary bees lay eggs in their own nests, from which young bees emerge in spring to feed on nectar and pollinate flowers in the process.

The blue orchard mason bee, *Osmia lignaria*, is solitary and indigenous and nests in forested areas on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of North America. This wood-dwelling bee emerges when the temperature reaches 14°C (57°F). It's no coincidence that this is also the temperature when fruit trees blossom. Blue

orchard mason bees are very effective pollinators, visiting up to 2,000 blossoms a day. These non-aggressive bees are easily mistaken for blue bottle flies, as they are a shiny, blue-black colour and slightly smaller than a honey bee.

Bees are the principle source of pollination for flowers, fruits and vegetables and it's in the gardener's best interest to provide them a healthy, pesticide-free habitat. Here are some suggestions for encouraging the presence of pollinating bees in your garden:

- With a limited foraging range of 91 metres (100 yards), blue orchard mason bees pollinate plants close to their nests. Provide them with nesting boxes that are simple to make or you may also purchase them. Make sure the nesting cavities are in stackable layers so they can be removed and cleaned to prevent the spread of deadly bee mites.
- Leave dead wood, branches and tree trunks in the garden where wood-dwelling bees can nest.
- Leave areas of non-cultivated, undis-

turbed soil for bumble bees, which live in the ground.

- Grow single flowers in blue, yellow and purple that bloom in April to early June to attract native bees that collect nectar and build their nests during that period.
- Provide a constant source of flowers for bumble and honey bees, which feed for the entire growing season. Short-tongued bees like the shallow flowers of the Umbelliferae, Brassica and Compositae families. Long-tongued bees are attracted to flowers with deep corollas, such as larkspur, columbine, snapdragon, mint and members of the Solanaceae family.
- Double flowers do not attract bees. They are showy, but produce less pollen.
- Native plants supply bees with a good source of food.
- Provide a shallow water source in which bees may dip and sip and make mud for nesting.
- Avoid pesticide use. Residues on flowers can be fatal to bees. If control is necessary, use the least toxic product and spray late in the evening when bees are not flying.

From *A Year on the Garden Path: A 52-Week Organic Gardening Guide* by Carolyn Herriot. Second edition \$24.95. Available from your favourite bookstore or order online at www.earthfuture.com/gardenpath.

Vital but vanishing

According to Stephen Buchmann, co-author of *The Forgotten Pollinators*, 70 to 90 percent of the indigenous bee population in the US has been lost to urban sprawl and the widespread use of pesticides. Naomi Saville, who specialized in zoology and ecology at Cambridge University, has noted that the number of bumble bee species in the UK has fallen from 19 to six.

In his article *Honeybees Vanish, Leaving Keepers in Peril* (*New York Times*, February 27), Alexei Barionuevo refers to a Cornell University study, which estimated that honeybees pollinate more than \$14 billion worth of seeds and crops – mostly fruits, vegetables and nuts – in the US annually. “Every third bite we consume in our diet is dependent on a honey bee to pollinate that food,” says Zac Brown, vice president of the American Beekeeping Federation.”

Read the complete article at www.nytimes.com/2007/02/27/business/27bees.

Forgiveness and freedom

by Calvin Sandborn

My dad held everyone to the strictest standards. He never forgave himself, and seldom forgave others. He died blaming everybody. On the day Dad died, he was driving us to school in our 10-year-old Plymouth. Halfway there, the engine died, and the car glided down a suddenly silent dirt road. “Oh, for Christ’s sake!” Dad exclaimed, and pulled over onto the shoulder. He hit the brakes hard, almost throwing me into the steel dash.

Behind me, my sister Pam rebounded off the seat-back, clutching her second-grade reader to her chest. Next to her, nine-year-old Candy spilled her lunch bucket with a clatter. Pam fell back into the rear seat, exhaling heavily, “Whoo!” Dad tried to start the car. Click. “God-damit!” he muttered, repeatedly turning the key on and off. Nothing. He tried again, then sat back and glared at the silent ignition, “Don’t do this to me, you rusty sonofabitch!”

One more try. No luck. “Jesus Christ on a crippled crutch!” he muttered, as he jerked the hood release. He struggled to

lifted the battery off its platform, and probed below with the screwdriver. A minute later he jerked back, shaking a nicked finger. “Sweet Jesus!” But he didn’t stop to take care of it. Instead, he leaned back into the engine and railed against the man who sold him the car last year. “I never should have trusted that sonofabitch Armstrong! I never should have believed him. He screwed me! Sound as a dollar, my ass!”

Candy and Pam huddled in the far corner of the back seat, whispering. They giggled once. I checked the car clock. “I don’t want to be late for school, Dad,” I called out. “Should we go ahead and walk?” He pulled back from the hood and stared at me through the windshield, blankly, as if I were a stranger. After a moment, he looked away, “What the hell do I care?” Bending back under the hood, he mumbled something. I didn’t move.

Finally Dad got back in, seat springs groaning under his weight. He wiped his bloody finger on the engine rag, then threw the rag onto the floor in front of me. “Now this had better work!” He

I wish someone had told him that he didn’t have to be a superhero; he was simply human. I wish he had realized that he could be forgiven, and that he could forgive.

raise his heavy body out of the driver’s seat and stepped outside, slamming the door behind him. As the girls whispered tensely in the back seat, I sat in the front and watched Dad. For a moment he just stood there, frowning at the cattle in the field, squinting into the brilliant spring morning. The green grasslands, carpeted with tiny red and yellow flowers, stretched across a small prairie to Submarine Hill. Scores of tiny cotton puffs drifted down from the tall cottonwoods along the nearby stream and filled the air around Dad.

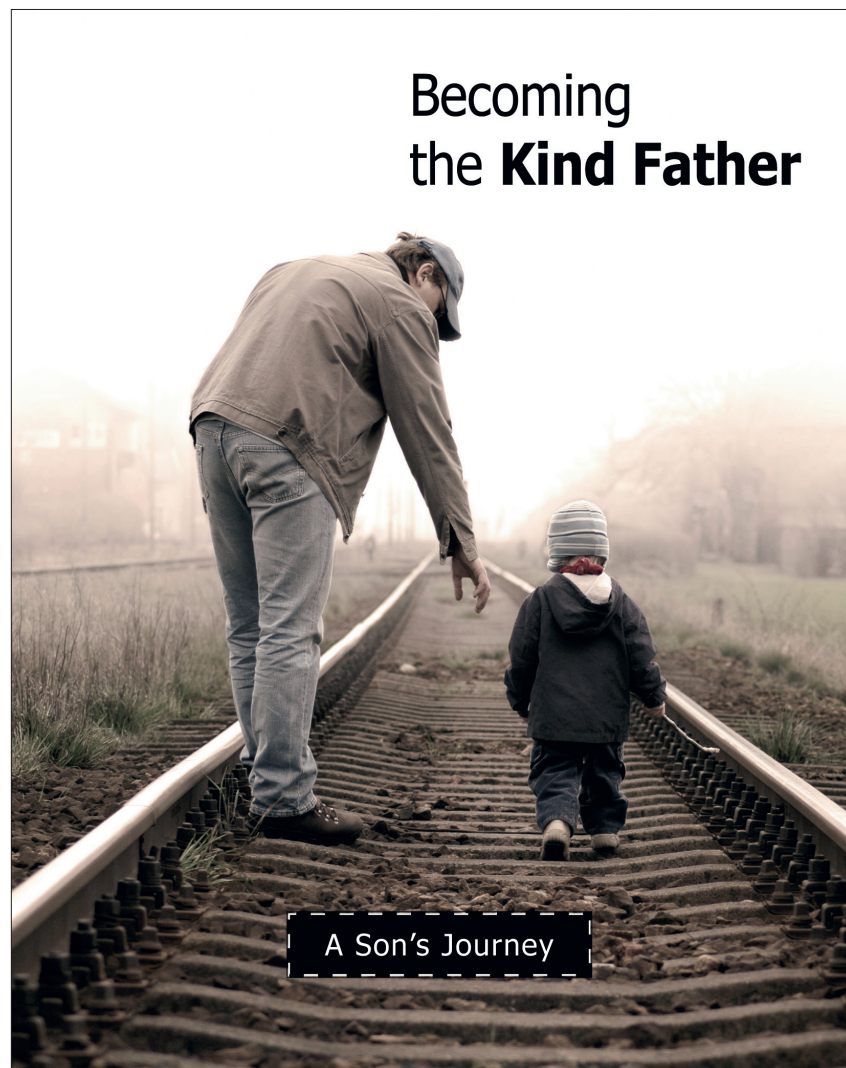
Sweat beading on his forehead in the warm early light, Dad swatted the fluff out of his face. He took a soft pack of Camels out of his pocket, lit one and took a deep drag, sourly contemplating failure. “That bastard Armstrong,” he finally muttered, throwing the fresh cigarette down and grinding it under his shoe. “Whatta piece of junk!” Shaking his head, he lumbered over to the trunk and rummaged around, returning with a screwdriver. Fury building, he heaved the hood open. “Goddam that Armstrong to hell, anyway!”

From where I sat, I could look through the hood opening and see Dad’s hands working aimlessly in the engine compartment, the anchor tattoo on his forearm moving in and out of view. He

turned the key back and forth several times. At one point the engine started to catch. “Oh, baby,” Dad coaxed hopefully, “Oh, baby, come on.” The engine shuddered for a full minute, rattled, then died. Dad leaned back and sighed heavily. He turned and looked out the window. The cotton puffs drifted across the sky, a legion of tiny parachutes. Finally he sat up and smacked the steering wheel as hard as he could. I jerked involuntarily.

“Jeez-us, just shoot me if I ever deal with that crook again. Nothing but sonofabitchin’ headaches. The Goddam con!” At this point, I turned, gave the girls a meaningful look and discretely gathered up my books. “OK, Dad, we’d better go,” I ventured quietly. He didn’t respond, so we got out and started to walk away. “Bye, Dad,” Candy called out to him. “Yeah, yeah,” he growled, shaking his head, impatiently waving us away.

“C’mon,” I urged, “we can’t be late.” Pam took my hand. As we walked down the road, I could hear him in the distance: “That bastard Armstrong had the nerve! Palming this off on me!” he shouted. I looked back in time to see him raise his right fist and slam it down onto the steel fender. “Goddam him to hell!” The fender reverberated, a heavy hollow sound. The car never did start; it had to be



A Son’s Journey

towed. And I never spoke to Dad again. He died late that night, as the arteries in his chest burst from ancient blame.

In his last years, this was my father. Consumed by failure, first he blamed himself, then he blamed others. It was all some sonofabitch’s fault. He forgave no one. Tom Armstrong was just the latest in a long line of people that he blamed his life for. And in the end, this man who routinely inflicted blame on others was the one who suffered the most. Refusing to give himself and others a simple break, he alienated family and friends. He missed his last chance to say goodbye to his kids. He died in an empty hospital room. It’s a paradox. Dad’s refusal to forgive others destroyed him.

Forgiving dad

For a long time, I hated my dad and didn’t forgive him. I hated him for his drinking, his rages, his vulgarity, for walking around the house in his underwear, for peeing in the bathroom sink, for scaring me. When I was 13, I wished he would die. And then he did. I thought I had killed him. For 15 years, I never mentioned his name to anyone. Applying a kid’s magical thinking, I was scared to death I might kill someone else with mere thoughts. For the longest time, I

couldn’t forgive myself. I was scared to death that I would damage someone else. But I’m healing. And as I write this chapter and explore the idea of forgiveness, I think of Dad: His father dying at about the time that boys are first forbidden to feel their emotions, at age five; publicly humiliated by his preacher grandfather in front of the congregation at 14; running away from home and living on his own; adventuring to Alaska, becoming a bush pilot and later a glad-handing California salesman, a Willie Loman, a man’s man, a man finally undone by unemployment, drinking and failure.

Dad never took the first step towards forgiveness. He never got in touch with his own pain, never knew how to process his own tender feelings. Instead he took the “Anger Path” and forced those unwanted feelings onto us. He blamed himself for feeling forbidden pain, then quickly shifted that blame onto us. He took us all to live in the “Country of Resentment.” Eventually, he drank and blamed the forbidden feelings away. And he killed himself in the process. But he wasn’t always like that. A memory returns:

It was evening at the river. I was five, and Dad was still young and strong.

continued on p. 34

25 Aprils

by Joseph Roberts

Iole purpose of laughing at nothing for extended periods of time.

I tried a variation of this myself. Last summer, I lay in a group of a dozen people in a field on Salt Spring Island, with the back of my head resting against the stomach of a stranger, who leaned her head against someone else's stomach, and so on, in a herringbone line-up of participants. The instructor stood and instructed the first person in the line-up to not laugh – not an easy thing to do given the absurdity of the situation. As his belly jiggled, the head of the next person bobbed up and down and she began to laugh in response. Laughter exploded along the reclining participants like a line of firecrackers. How could you not crack up when your head was leaning against someone who was convulsing with laughter?

The purpose of this seriously-silly exercise, during a seminar on humour, was to get the participants to experience the force of unrestrained laughter. Health experts know plenty about how laughter benefits the immune system. Yet laughter clubs and other organized efforts at spontaneous fun may seem a bit strange to westerners. They run counter to the persistent notion among WASPS that self-improvement shouldn't be all that easy or even enjoyable. They could also be seen to mock our more serious efforts in this department, whether through yoga, meditation, exercise, education, work or religious instruction.

Perhaps our ideas of happiness-as-birthright and our sombre efforts to get there are part of the problem. There's no shortage of advice from the media about what we need to be happy and how to get it, yet this always seems to involve a heap of credit. Lifestyle advertisers tempt us with amazing possibilities, but few of us will become bodhisattvas with washboard stomachs and water views.

The end result is that a satisfying and complete life is always receding into some imagined future. It sometimes feels like a rigged game, with the pot of gold as vaporous as the registered retirement rainbow leading to it. As Tom Robbins wrote in an essay in 2003, it may seem a tall order cultivating a rich inner life in a culture "... whose institutions – academic, governmental, religious and otherwise – seem determined to suffocate it with a polyester pillow from Wal-Mart."

Robbins, however, had a way out in mind: "Unbeknownst to most western intellectuals, there happens to be a fairly thin line between the silly and the profound, between the clear light and the joke, and it seems to me that on that frontier is the single most risky and sig-

nificant place artists or philosophers can station themselves."

And not just artists or philosophers; it's a risky business for anyone to wear the fool's coxcomb into a respectable setting. But membership has its rewards, starting with the fact that there are no monthly dues in the fools' borderless club.

Robbins himself is a practitioner of a kind of foolish literature that never fit well in the literary canon. The Toronto-New York lit-crit establishment favours writers who traffic in tragedy, through either fiction or memoir. Serious books endorsing the idea of an unfriendly, random universe are usually the ones deemed timeless. Describing a book as "difficult" is considered a recommendation rather than a red flag. This holds true for the rest of the "serious" arts as well. If you are an artist in search of an arts grant, obscurity helps. If you must have humour, it better be of the gallows variety. If you go for absurdity, make it in the spirit of Kafka rather than Cleeze.

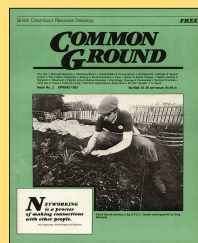
Back in 1909, UK writer G.K. Chesterton praised a different sort of foolishness in the writings of Lewis Carroll in his essay *A Defence of Nonsense*:

"We know what Lewis Carroll was in daily life: he was a singularly serious and conventional don, universally respected, but very much of a pedant and something of a Philistine. Thus his strange double life in earth and in dreamland emphasizes the idea that lies at the back of nonsense – the idea of 'escape'... into a world where things are not fixed horribly in an eternal appropriateness, where apples grow on pear trees and any odd man you meet may have three legs."

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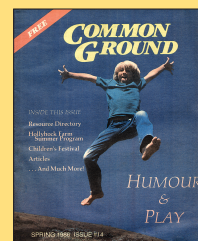
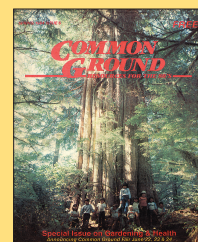
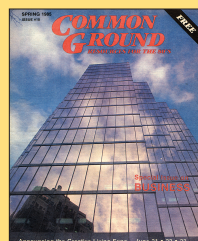


foot on both worlds – a perfect type of the position of modern nonsense. His "Wonderland" is a country populated by insane mathematicians. We feel the whole is an escape into a world of masquerade; we feel that if we could pierce their disguises, we might discover that Humpty Dumpty and the March Hare were professors and Doctors of Divinity



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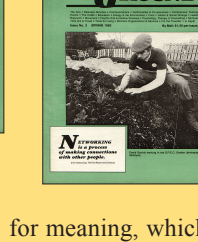
Of course, ever since Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, we get the idea of an absurd world all too well. Outside the arts, we now have two extremes of officially-endorsed meaninglessness. The first is the "scientific" idea of a random universe ruled by inhuman forces to no particular purpose. The second is the religious fundamentalists' take on ancient myths. In the latter world view, meta-



phors are misread as literal truths, leaving a temperamental God (or Gods) as the only option, as unpredictable as electrons and as arbitrary as Alice's Red Queen.

It would seem there are few options between the two extremes of faith and faithlessness. One recent offering promotes a popular misinterpretation of quantum theory, in which the observer "creates" his or her reality, a half-truth that can only inflate the ego. It isn't that that the solipsistic vision of pop science entertainment like *What the Bleep Do We Know?* is crazy, it's that it's not quite crazy enough. As Sir James Jeans wrote prophetically in 1933, "The universe may not only turn out to be queerer than we imagine, but queerer than we *can* imagine."

So where does that leave us? In 1960, Zen philosopher and writer Alan Watts offered a unique perspective on meaning and meaninglessness. In his lecture *The Sense of Non-Sense*, he addressed the persistent human search



for meaning, which has driven not only some of the highest productions of the arts and sciences, but some of the worst excesses of religion and politics as well.

Watts reasonably argued that the universe has no meaning, at least not in the semantic sense, because only words have meaning, signifying things beyond themselves. The set of letters that spells "fork" is not, itself, a fork. How could the universe – all that there is and ever will be – signify anything beyond itself? The cosmos, Watts insisted, is a system of patterns at play, a loom of electromagnetic waves weaving a tapestry of ever-changing themes. The whole shebang has a great resemblance to music and dancing, which, in themselves, make no sense because they're not intended to mean anything other than what they are. The meaning and the activity are one and the same.

Watts asked us to consider baroque music, which obviously doesn't signify any abstract idea, but neither does it express some concretely expressible emotion. "It is felt to be significant not because it means something other than itself, but because it is so satisfying as it is."

Watts pointed out that the feeling of meaninglessness is often equated with the existence of neurosis. "So many activities into which one is encouraged to enter, philosophies one is encouraged to believe in, religions one is encouraged to join, are commended on the basis of the fact they give life a meaning."

They offer an escape hatch from the sinking ship of nihilism, the dead end that often results from believing in a purposeless universe. But what, Watts asked, does it mean that life has to have a purpose? "We feel life ought to have significance and be a symbol in at least that sense or at least not as arid a symbol as a mere sign."

Fair enough. A person feels he or she should have some plan behind their life and that they should fit into some group enterprise that offers fellowship. Beyond this, there is the more immediate sense of meaning when you can satisfy all your biological urges. But given



the uncertainty of life,



the world, people are finding new means to “lose it.” From India to China to East Vancouver, participants gather at “laughter clubs,” with the sole purpose of laughing at nothing for extended periods of time.

I tried a variation of this myself. Last summer, I lay in a group of a dozen people in a field on Salt Spring Island, with the back of my head resting against the stomach of a stranger, who leaned her head against someone else’s stomach, and so on, in a herringbone line-up of participants. The instructor stood and instructed the first person in the line-up to not laugh – not an easy thing to do given the absurdity of the situation. As his belly jiggled, the head of the next person bobbed up and down and she began to laugh in response. Laughter exploded along the reclining participants like a line of firecrackers. How could you not crack up when your head was leaning against someone who was convulsing with laughter?

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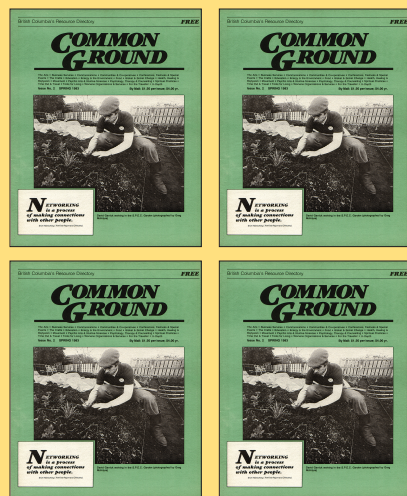
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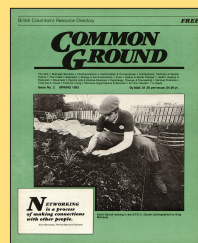
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Shepherd’s Pie

This classic comfort food from *Becoming Vegetarian* (Melina and Davis, Wiley Canada, 2003) may stir fond memories from childhood. It has a dark, rich, meaty-flavoured bottom layer, a middle layer of bright-yellow corn and a smooth topping of mashed potato. Use either a combination of creamed corn and corn niblets or one or the other. Makes 10 cups (eight servings of 1-1/4 cups).

Potato topping

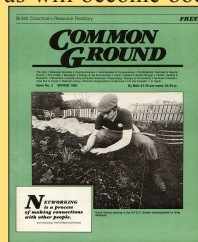
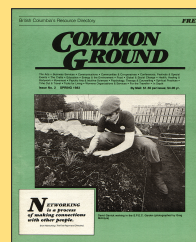
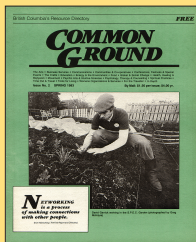
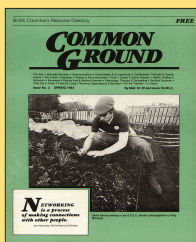
8 large russet potatoes, peeled (4 lbs)
3-4 tbsp olive oil (45-60 ml)
½ cup fortified soymilk or rice milk (125 ml)
½ tsp salt (2 ml)
¼ tsp white or black pepper (1 ml)

Pie mixture

12 oz (two packages) Yves Veggie Ground Round (680 g)
2-2/3 cups onion, diced (670 ml)
6 cloves garlic, minced
1-1/2 cups chopped celery (375 ml)
1 tbsp olive oil (15 ml)
2 tbsp and 2 tsp vegetarian Worcestershire sauce (i.e. Wizard) (40 ml)
2 tbsp tamari, Bragg liquid soy or soy sauce (30 ml)
1 tsp salt (optional) (2 ml)
½ tbsp tarragon (7 ml)
1 tsp thyme (5 ml)
½ tsp black pepper (2 ml)
14-oz can creamed corn (398 ml)
14-oz can corn niblets, drained (398 ml) or 1-1/2 cup frozen corn kernels, thawed (375 ml)
¼ tsp paprika (1 ml)

Preheat oven to 350°F (177°C). Cut each potato into thirds and cook in boiling water until tender. Meanwhile, in skillet, sauté onion, garlic and celery in oil over medium-high heat until soft. Turn off heat, add crumbled Yves Veggie Ground Round, Worcestershire sauce, tamari, salt (if using), tarragon, thyme, pepper and mix thoroughly. Transfer Veggie Ground Round mixture to a casserole dish (9 by 13-inch or 23 by 33 cm), sprayed or lightly oiled. Spread mixture and pack evenly. Mix creamed corn and corn kernels together. Spread corn mixture over Veggie Ground Round mixture. Drain potatoes. Add oil, soymilk, salt and pepper and mash until fluffy. Spread potato topping evenly over corn. Sprinkle top with paprika and bake for 20 minutes or until heated through.

Per cup (250 ml): Calories: 262; protein: 6 g; fat: 6 g; carbohydrates: 48 g; dietary fibre: 5 g; calcium: 56 mg; iron: 1.9 mg; magnesium: 54 mg; sodium: 627 mg; zinc: 1.4 mg;



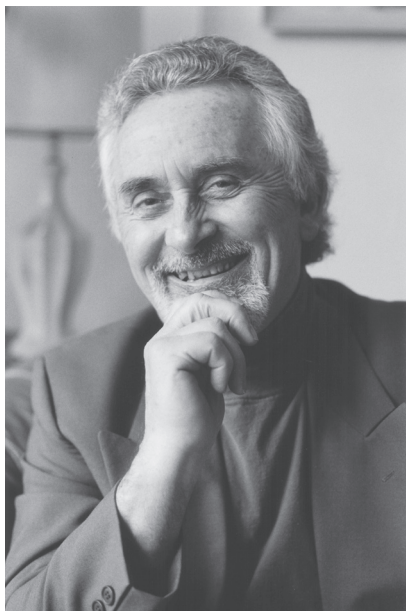
washboard stomachs

Letters to the editor

Remembering Henry Dorst

I met Henry Dorst when I was first exploring the realm of natural healing. Henry was already well established as a shiatsu practitioner and consequently I looked up to him as one might a mentor. We met at numerous healing gatherings and other holistic healing events.

Henry was always enthusiastic about selflessly sharing his growing knowledge and he often used me as a guinea pig for his explorations of bio-kinesiology. One of Henry's wonderful qualities was his very inquisitive nature. Henry researched and developed every area of knowledge that he was drawn to, and his inherent curiosity made him a leader in every field that he embraced. It was a joy for me to watch Henry evolve from his work with shiatsu to biokinesiology and eventually dowsing and feng shui.



Henry was an intelligent man of independent mind who thought outside the box. He was an inventor, compassionate and generous, a healer and a spiritually-aware man who lived by his convictions and exuded a quiet confidence. The West Coast healing community has lost one of its esteemed elders with the passing of Henry Dorst. God bless his soul.

Chris Shirley, Vancouver

Editor: In last month's issue, the black and white photos of Henry Dorst were taken by artist and photographer Bill Gillespie, 604-684-3493. Here is one more.

Water ownership is insane

As a European by birth and upbringing, and a Canadian by choice for most of my adult life, I often find my spirit floating above the Atlantic waters which separate two continents, not sure where to rest in peace. For many years, Canada was my obvious choice, a proud and

open-minded country, always at the forefront of democracy, human rights and social responsibility. Yet something is dramatically changing. Canada, as I knew it, is now disappearing in front of my very eyes. The maple leaf flag is still waving, while all the great values the flag represented to many people in the world are quietly being dismantled.

So when I learned that our own government opposes the idea of making the right to water a human right (*Make Water a Human Right*, Maude Barlow, March 2007), I wasn't surprised or shocked. I was simply ashamed.

There are people on this planet who honestly believe that the privatization of everything – of every square foot of land and every drop of water – is the answer to the ecological disaster we are facing. They call it pragmatism. I call it insanity. One must be insane to believe that the Earth, with all its resources, is for sale. One has to be a pathological bully to believe that you can go around dividing it all, claiming your right to something, while denying that same right to others.

The Earth is not for sale. It belongs to everyone. So does its bounty – its resources that support human life. Water is one of those resources and free access to it should be the undeniable right of every human being.

Kris Kozak, Vancouver

Kudos and criticism for CG's article on *The Secret*

I am very grateful for *Common Ground's* commitment to truth; in particular, Geoff Olson's bold debunking of the disturbingly-popular movie *The Secret*. (*The Secret: The Big Mystery Everyone Is Talking About*, March 2007.) This glorification of navel-gazing goes far beyond the self-evident value of positive thinking into the cultivation of delusional magical thinking: the belief that thoughts influence objective reality.

The film is popular because it coddles our inner child, a child unable to fathom prerequisites and consequences, a child who believes the universe owes him something, a child unwilling to face loss caused by greed. The website even offers a printable, blank cheque from the "Universal Bank (Un)Limited," with instructions to "... Fill in your name and the amount you wish to receive."

Ironically, almost everything *The Secret* teaches – to focus on things you don't have, avoid facing effort or cost, believe you're entitled and expect magical outcomes – defines poverty consciousness. To feel empowered and genuinely wealthy is to love what you have and what you can do, and to honour the

humility that the power to create can also destroy. A healthy soul enjoys the ability to give to others and has no need for secrets about acquisition and domination.

Unfortunately, this secret way of thinking does yield results, as is demonstrated daily by corrupt politicians and corporate pirates, by spiritualizing avarice and justifying unbridled greed. For the fortunate, the so-called "Law of Attraction" serves mainly as a pathetic excuse for oppression and graft; that privilege is the product of positive thinking. This is naturally popular with North Americans who don't want to admit how much they benefit from foreign, economic slavery. It also conveniently convinces us to not be angry about injustice, but rather to pity those less fortunate for not knowing the secret.

What the world needs now is love, not lust; co-operation, not competition; wisdom, not wealth. This secret, a supposedly hidden but desirable truth, stands in stark contrast to the undesirable, yet unequivocal, reality revealed in *An Inconvenient Truth*. The latter embraces global reality and inspires community, conversation, cooperation and creativity for the benefit of all, while the former encourages private fantasy in scheming for personal gain. The popularity of *The Secret* and its Law of Attraction depressingly highlights the commonality of dull-witted and desperate self-interest and how easily our vision is distorted by materialism's "Lens of Acquisition." Blessedly, however, many see past that illusion and value community more than commodities and choose connection instead of privilege. For genuine personal fulfillment and happiness, that is the true secret.

Patrick Dubois, Vancouver

Kudos to Geoff Olson for his article about *The Secret*. I had been hearing about this movie from so many people and was excited to check it out. However, I, along with the people who watched it with me, was extremely disappointed by the film's blatant celebration of materialism and individualism. The ancient, secret concepts presented – used largely by the filmmakers to promote selfish consumerism – could have been presented as tools to help alleviate the disconnection from our planet and from our fellow human beings many of us are feeling right now. (Focusing our collective energies on creating more kindness and compassion on a community level, for example.)

I'm surprised and saddened that people continue to recommend this film. Next time, I will direct them to your article. Thanks.

Aleya Abdulla, Vancouver

I have personally interviewed several of the people that appeared in *The Secret* and I am continually amazed at my personal experiences of synchronicity; you throw that point in as a tidbit of concession near the end of your article.

Of course, snake oil salesmen are a dime a dozen, as are nay-saying critics. We are moving into an era where the world needs hope, and movies like *The Secret* hint at the greatness inside each and every one of us.

Even if it does herd consumers to the shops to buy a copy, and the latté-clutching crowd to chat over it in malls before spilling it to their CEO hubbies, it is better than the other garbage out there masquerading as truth.

So, Geoff, my view on your article is that you may be doing a disservice to all those who are numbed by a steady diet of negativity and fear-based media. I have been trying to get my wife to watch encouraging films such as this to boost her flagging self-esteem, but after she read your article, she is against it.

As you did in your article, I will end on a quote; this one by Marianne Williamson: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure."

Peter Williams, UK

Thank you so much for Geoff Olson's exposé of *The Secret*. I live on "New Age Island," Salt Spring, where this shell game of desire-meets-big-business flourishes. As a person who has dealt with a disabling neuroimmune disease for 20 years, the finger of failure is levelled at me with tiresome regularity. Just last week, a "Secret" seminar organizer had the nerve to tell me that I could change it if I wanted to. I'm not sure what she thinks I have been doing for 20 years.

In Wicca, we work with attraction and intention all the time; indeed, it's nothing new. We acknowledge, however, that our desires and goals are but a few threads in the vast web of being. We may tug the threads, but there are multiple forces at play and the outcome is never assured. That's life.

Any philosophy that addresses the individual alone, ignoring the sphere of community, is missing the most important half. And any philosophy that has people pointing their fingers in judgement, at me or at anyone else, is forgetting the real golden rule.

I am reminded of the classic *Serenity Prayer*: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

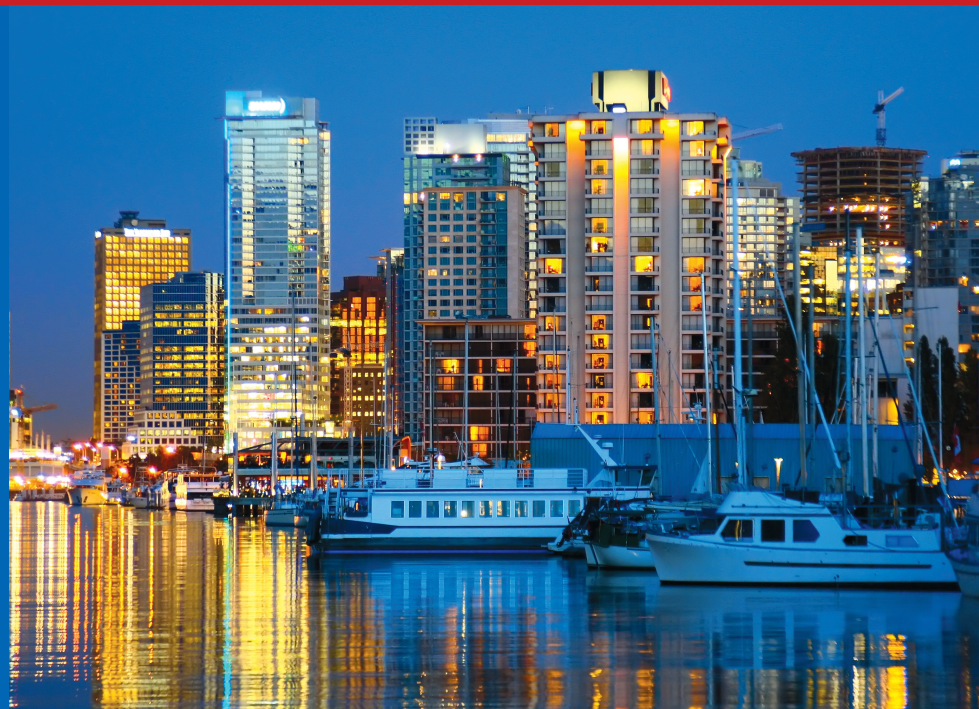
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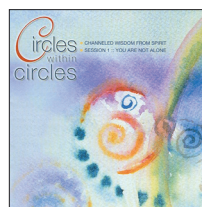
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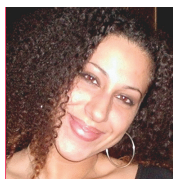
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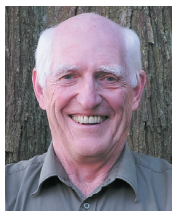
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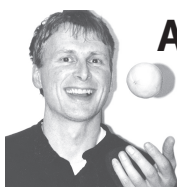
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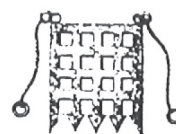
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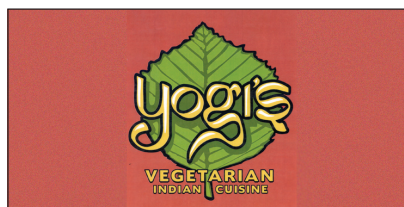
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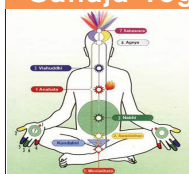
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Defying cont. from p. 9

Compliance strategies employ lots of new, whiz-bang information technologies to keep an increasingly close eye on your medication-taking habits. Rx Canada, which bills itself as a "provider of e-health adherence solutions for pharmacy" is but one example of a group leveraging information technology for "medication management and support."

Another company, MediVoxRX, in Pittsburgh, has developed Rex, the "talking pill bottle," which plays back to you, in your pharmacist's own voice, microchip-stored prescription information, from a little speaker on the bottle. Other adherence technologies can track how many times a day a bottle has been opened, and can gather your blood pressure and blood glucose readings and wirelessly and seamlessly send them to your doctor or caregiver. Pretty soon, it'll be more than Santa Claus who knows when you've been bad or good.

The whole problem with compliance in medicine is that we assume nothing bad can come from following orders. The work of Dr. Stanley Milgram, the famous psychologist who published *Obedience to Authority* in 1974, reminds us how far people will go to please authority. Participants in his studies were told to administer electric shocks of increasing intensity to a "subject" - Don't worry! It was an actor faking it - for getting wrong answers on a quiz. Many participants complied with his order, sometimes even until the subject appeared to be unconscious.

We all grasp at excuses for our lapses in judgement, but using the "just following orders" explanation to justify inflicting suffering on someone says tons about the complex human psychology around obedience.

This is troubling not just from the perspective of the patient, but also from that of the physician, who could also say that she is just following orders provided

by guideline committees or professional organizations when she chooses to put you on a new drug or subject you to a new test, even if it might cause you harm.

At the end of the day, can you afford to be choosy in deciding which bits of your doctor's advice you want to obey? Yes, but only if you decide sensibly. Any decision about treatment must incorporate two key things: Informed consent and your personal values. Deciding on whether you even want to be treated in the first place, given a full understanding of the risks and benefits, is vital. You don't want to take drugs, change your diet or exercise? Fine, that's your choice. But you can only make that choice after you are made aware of the benefits and harms related to the entire spectrum of interventions, as well as the costs involved and the alternatives, if any.

With the majority of conditions, there's no hurry to take a prescription. You can take your time and do your research. If it's type-2 diabetes or high

cholesterol you're worried about, you need to be informed and know your options, because you could very well be put on drugs for a really long time.

Luckily for us, new doctors coming out of medical school learn a new word: It's called "concordance," a much more enlightened way to deliver and accept medical advice. It's about agreement between a doctor and an informed patient. It is what drug decision-making should be about.

If we want to achieve rational health care in our society, we'd best put compliance where it belongs: in the dust bin of history.

Alan Cassels is co-author of Selling Sickness and a drug policy researcher at the University of Victoria. He is also the founder of Media Doctor Canada, which evaluates reporting of medical treatments in Canada's media. www.mediadoctor.ca

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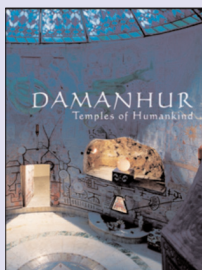
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APR 13-15 Foot Reflexology Introduction commences certificate weekend course. Intro: \$10, Course \$295. Pacific Institute of Reflexology, (604) 875-8818, www.pacificreflexology.com.

APR 14 Shamanic Drumming & Dreaming Circle: Saturday, 7pm. Insight/healing from your Nature Spirit guardians. Vancouver Multi-Cultural Centre, 1254, W. 7th. By donation. Turtle Island Healing Circles. 604-418-9636. www.drumcircles.ca.

APR 14 Civic Engagement in a Changing World The Dalai Lama Center, Board of Trade and CIAR hosts Robert Putnam (Bowling Alone) 8pm, Chan Centre, \$22/\$17, www.ticketmaster.ca.

APR 14 Community Potluck/Discussion of "Soulful Relationships." Join us for a fun, inspiring evening exploring love, life and consciousness. Make new connections with like-minded people. \$10 advance, \$15 on site. 604-731-1783, www.heartssongsolutions.ca.

APR 14, MAY 12 Effective Communication Small Group Workshop. John Morrier RPC teaches practical techniques to communicate empathetically and resolve conflict in relationships. 604-731-9262, john.morrier@telus.net.

APR 18 & 23 & 25 Dru Yoga UK International in Vancouver: Teachers Nan Marshall & Susan Kulas offer classes in two locations. April 18 & 25: West Van United Church 11:30am-1:30pm. Call JoAn, 604-986-8825. April 23: Sukha Yoga, 16th & Arbutus, 7-8:30pm. Call Roma, 604-264-7544. Co-sponsored by Common Ground.

APR 20 "Past Life Regression" - Experience a fascinating journey into your past for more understanding of your current life. 535 West 10th Ave. \$75. Pre-registration Rifa@lifebetweenlives.ca. 1-888-606-8463.

APR 22 Psychic Reading Fair: 15-20 minute readings. Healings also available. 1-4pm. CDM Psychic Institute, 1114 W. Broadway, Suite 202. Info: 604-730-8788.

APR 22 Bodytalk Vancouver Community Clinic. Suggested donation \$20. Net proceeds to charities. 10am-5pm by appointment: 778-389-7909, info@bodytalkvancouver.com, www.bodytalkvancouver.com. Training: May 27 & Jun 7-10. See ad below.

APR 22 Free concert & book launch: *Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos* by Bruce Sanguin, 7:30pm, Canadian Memorial United Church and Centre for Peace, 1825 W. 16th Ave. Info: 604-731-3101 www.canadianmemorial.org.

APR 22 Second Annual Interspiritual Gathering to Bless the Salmon: Hadden Park (behind the Maritime Museum), 1:30pm. www.falsecreekwatershed.org or email salmoncelebration@hotmail.com.

APR 25 Free Lecture: The Higher Spiritual Teachings of "The Master Teaching Foundation" titled: "With Love There Is Hope for You, Me and This Planet," 7:30pm, Firehall Library, 1455 West 10th, Van. 604-430-1882.

APR 27-29 "Circle of Justice" ceremonial weekend: Recreate & reinstitute your circle of freedom. Hosted by the Institute of Shamanic Medicine. Info/registration 1-877-329-8668. www.shamanicmedicine.ca. Email info@shamanicmedicine.ca.

APR 27-29 & JUN 30-JUL 1 Family Constellations Workshops, established in Europe, new to Canada. Discover the healing power of the past in your family system. Monthly demos. www.familyconstellations.ca, 604.221.7230.

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APR 28 & 29 Life Circuits "Tantra - Sacred Sexuality Workshop for Singles & Couples." Improve the condition of your love life. Enhance your awareness and connection to subtle energy. Increase your confidence. For details contact 604-731-1783, www.heartssongsolutions.ca.

APR 29 Kundalini Management: Learn how to co-operate safely with powerful energy currents. Tao Yoga Instructor, Minke de Vos. Sunday, 1-5pm, The Space, #305, 1008 Homer St., \$60 prepaid by April 15, 604-669-2505, www.silentground.com.

APR 30 Maya Sacred Path to 2012, Balancing the Masculine and Feminine, Lecture & Slides, Dr. Richard Jelusich, St. James Community Square, 3214 W. 10th, 7:00pm, \$25, RSVP, 604-980-0106.

MAY 2 Coding the Earth - Crop Circles, Sacred Sites, Cathedrals and the Coming Human Evolution UK author Freddy Silva at H.R. Macmillan Space Centre 7-9pm \$18/\$20. Advance reservations: www.invisibletemple.com, local contact John ccsc@aebc.com.

MAY 3-4 You've Gotta Have Friends: Discovering the Power of Friends & Belonging. Coast Hotel and Convention Centre, 20392 Fraser Hwy, Langley. 04-533-6546. See ad page 19. Info/register at: www.youvegottahavefriends.ca.

MAY 3-6 Vancouver Marathon May 6; Urban Lifestyle Expo May 3-5 at The Westin, Vancouver. To volunteer, call 604-872-2928 or register online at www.bmovanmarathon.ca.

MAY 6 Touch for Health Muscle Testing: Effortlessly learn to self-test and balance your body's acupuncture meridians. 9am-5pm, \$150, Centre for Peace, 16th & Burrard, Janice Golub, 604-220-1992.

MAY 11-16 Answering Creation With Creation, Charting Glenairley in Words and Images with Claire Robson and Pat Brennan. The beauty of Glenair-

ley will be "the university" we never attended. 250-642-3546, www.centreforearthandspirit.org.

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MAY 12 Life Art: The Essential Mastery of Communication Workshop for Singles & Couples. Improve the condition of your relationships. Set healthy boundaries. Apply the Law Of Attraction. Regenerate your Life. For details contact 604-731-1783, www.heartssongsolutions.ca.

MAY 13 True Nature: Master your Own Upward Spiral. "Power vs. Force" based workshop for Singles & Couples. Acquire powerful spiritual life mastery tools and apply the Law of Attraction for the deliberate creation of the life you want. For details contact 604-731-1783, www.heartssongsolutions.ca.

MAY 18-20 Dr. Vasant Lad Ayurveda Seminar/Fundraiser - Fund-raising evening: Friday, May 18 @ 6pm. Seminar: May 19 & 20; Information & registration: 604-290-8201, www.ayurveda-seminars.com.

MAY 22 Feet Glorious Feet - an insightful presentation with international speaker Chris Stormer for any Body with feet. 6:30-9:30pm in Burnaby. Contact Margo Nielsen at 604-589-3599, www.alwaysb.com.

JUN 25- JUL 1 Divinity Within Spiritual Retreat (Tigh-Na-Mara Resort, Vancouver Island) "The most important relationship you can foster is with your Divine Self." - AnaLaRai, 1-250-752-5117.

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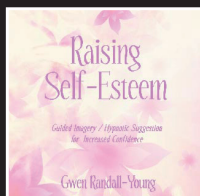
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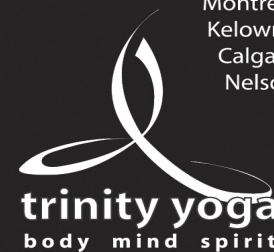
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Reflexology Student Clinic sessions, only \$18. Evenings only. By appointment. Pacific Institute of Reflexology. 604-875-8818, www.pacificreflexology.com.

Free Tao Te Ching Classes: 7:30-9:30pm. Seeking a path to inner peace? Learn the wisdom of Lao Tzu with renowned Tao Master Lin Liang Meng. English/Mandarin. Email Neelam@sewanti.com, 604-323-1198.

WEDNESDAYS

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THURSDAYS

Pranic Healing Clinic: Non-touch energy healing. By donation. Thursdays 10am-2pm. West Vancouver United Church, 2062 Esquimalt Ave. Closed last Thursday of month. www.pranichealing.ca/vancouver.

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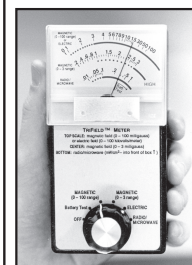
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We were camping in the California Coast Range. Although I couldn't swim, I had wandered down to the river after dinner, and paddled an inner tube out to the middle of the big dark pool. I lay back in the inner tube, gazing at the cliff that loomed above, on the other side of the water.

Suddenly I slipped through the middle of the tube, and I was in the water, struggling. I sank into the cold dark water. As I struggled to the surface, I could see my dad running down the beach, tearing off his shoes, and plunging powerfully into the river. Then I was under again, swallowing cold water, sinking into blackness. In a moment, I was pushed powerfully to the surface. He had come up below me, pushing me to the air. As I gasped for air, he rose like a sea lion to the surface below me and I was saved. But then he swallowed water and began to cough and struggle himself. "Dad!" I cried in a panic. He sank below me and I again fell back into the black waters, gulping and sputtering, stepping on his head. As we sank, the murky yellow light of the world receded into darkness, with no sound but my thundering heartbeat.

I felt his hands grip my calves and place my feet firmly on his shoulders. Then, as in the game we'd often played, he drifted down and bounced back up from the river bottom, thrusting me to the surface. And then his tattooed arm was around my chest, towing me to safety. Keeping my face above the water, he coughed, then murmured, "It's OK, Cal. It's OK." Finally we staggered onto the little sandy beach, and Dad hugged me.

As I stood gasping, shivering and crying, he hugged me to his heaving chest. Then he went over and got a towel out of the trailer and wrapped it around me. Later, as he heated hot chocolate on the Coleman stove, he did the unusual; he sat me on his lap. After a while, he turned the Giants' game on the radio, and we sipped hot chocolate while the sun sank behind the cliff.

By the end, I think Dad, like me, had totally forgotten that day. He forgot his goodness. I wish that, when he ruminated on his failures, he had been able to remember the good things. I wish that, when he thought of his years of unemployment, his bankruptcy, the jalopies he drove, his failed marriages, his destructive anger, he had been able to recall that day on the river.

Most of all, I wish he'd had a kind father to remind him of the good things about himself: his sense of humor, his charm, his ability to spin a story for a crowd, his compassion for the unfortunate, his intelligence, his ability to make a day's outing with a young boy into an exciting adventure.

I wish he had understood that he was no different than any of us, a mixture of good and bad. I wish someone had told him that he didn't have to be a superhero; he was simply human. I wish he had realized that he could be forgiven, and that he could forgive. The fact was he didn't have to die alone in the "Country of Resentment." There was room for him in the "Country of Love."

Excerpted from Becoming the Kind Father by Calvin Sandborn, copyright 2007, New Society Publishers.



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On Track Zodiac

APRIL 2007 Adrien Dilon



ARIES (Mar 21 – Apr 19)

A mustard seed of hope is all you need to carry out your dreams. Believe and make things happen while you have the sun shining in your favour. Aries is an agent of dynamic proportions and the ripple effect of your actions will cause tremendous things to happen.



TAURUS (Apr 20 – May 21)

Will you go on a shopping spree or create a garden of flowers? Only that which gives you immense gratification will matter. Women look into their femininity; men, all things luxurious and pleasurable. Social agreements, high drama or simple amusements play out. Terrific fun!



GEMINI (May 22 – Jun 20)

Sparks may be flying from your fingers as you try to take on too many projects. If you feel mentally overwhelmed, try turning off the TV and radio and tune in to a different frequency. Your system may undergo a metamorphosis, leading you to seek new forms of stimulation.



CANCER (Jun 21 – Jul 22)

While you desire to put your house in order, your inherited tendencies could get the best of you. Secret matters that have been kept secret will be exposed, bringing about a new arrangement for communication. You will need to come clean with your feelings about past events so you can move forward. Break free of guises and adopted beliefs.



LEO (Jul 23 – Aug 22)

Mid-month, you will feel as if the weight of the world is off your shoulders. A planetary forward direction eases your struggle. Renovation and construction are not only for buildings. Anything you desire to preserve or restore is in your power to complete. It is in your hands.



VIRGO (Aug 23 – Sep 22)

To feel a sense of well-being and belonging is of vast importance to you now. You have learned to accept your strengths and weaknesses, bringing you a new level of understanding. You are defining what is important and what you can bring to society or to your circle of influence, at least.



LIBRA (Sep 23 – Oct 22)

If you are filled with the desire to atone, it may be because you need to clear the air with people. Being candid will help you gain the understanding of others. Standing firm, you can move mountains, bringing you a sense of accomplishment. Self-expression on your own terms will set you free.



SCORPIO (Oct 23 – Nov 21)

You are attracted to what challenges you, not what is easy. This is the path of the warrior: To learn and unfold as a conscious being. Relationships will have a definite zing as you, even unconsciously, seek to do more "work" on your character. Lessons come with illuminating force.



SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22 – Dec 21)

While you may feel emotionally restricted this month, it doesn't appear that way when the gods of beneficial influence take a detour. Take a break yourself, with music or anything that shifts you into a state of exhilaration and allows you to rejoice in who you are right now. You will keep seeking what you need to learn.



CAPRICORN (Dec 22 – Jan 19)

If boredom has come over you like a bad suit, the way through discomfort is to make a change. The desire to get back to nature and calm surroundings may overwhelm you. Your usual reserved personality may want to go even deeper into seclusion. No one tells the lilies to bloom; they do it all by themselves.



AQUARIUS (Jan 20 – Feb 19)

You could be feeling more negativity and doubt as strong Neptunian influences draw you on to a foggy course. You will either feel deluded by your vision or make choices built from strong spiritual convictions. Duality is apparent, but laughter is also the way through your perceptions into paradise.



PISCES (Feb 20 – Mar 20)

Pisces is all about what is "hidden" and you find it easier to carry out your plans in privacy; self-mastery is yours in seclusion. Education will replace an over-indulgence in food and addictions. Plough the seeds and till your imagination to bring what you want into reality. Incredible times are ahead.

Ilona Hedi Granik has recently changed her name to Adrien Dilon. She is a clairvoyant consultant and author with 32 years of experience in astrology, multimedia art and healing, adrien.dilon@gmail.com, www.HeartLightCentre.com.

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